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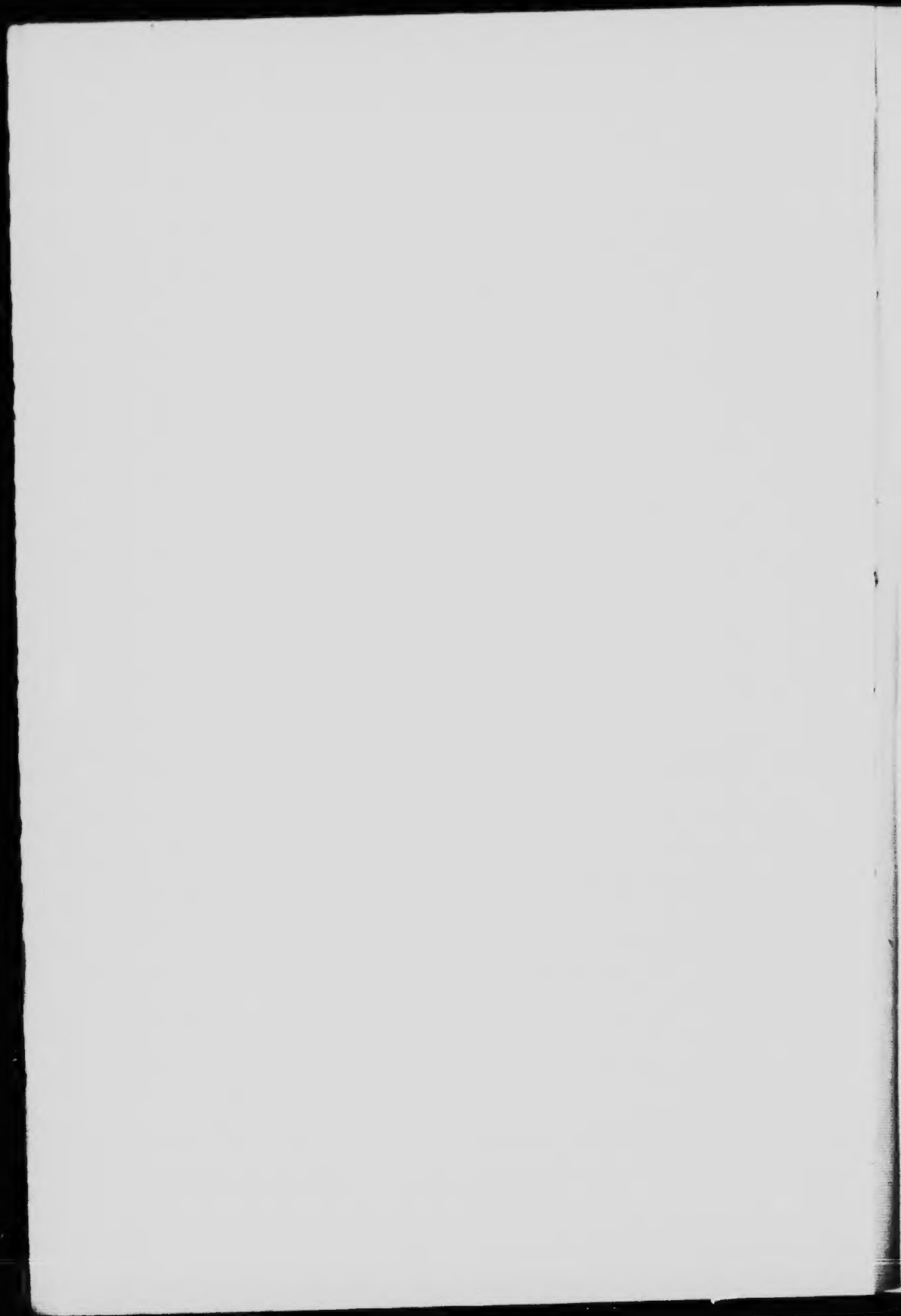
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**DR THORNE'S
IDEA**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LAST AMERICAN.

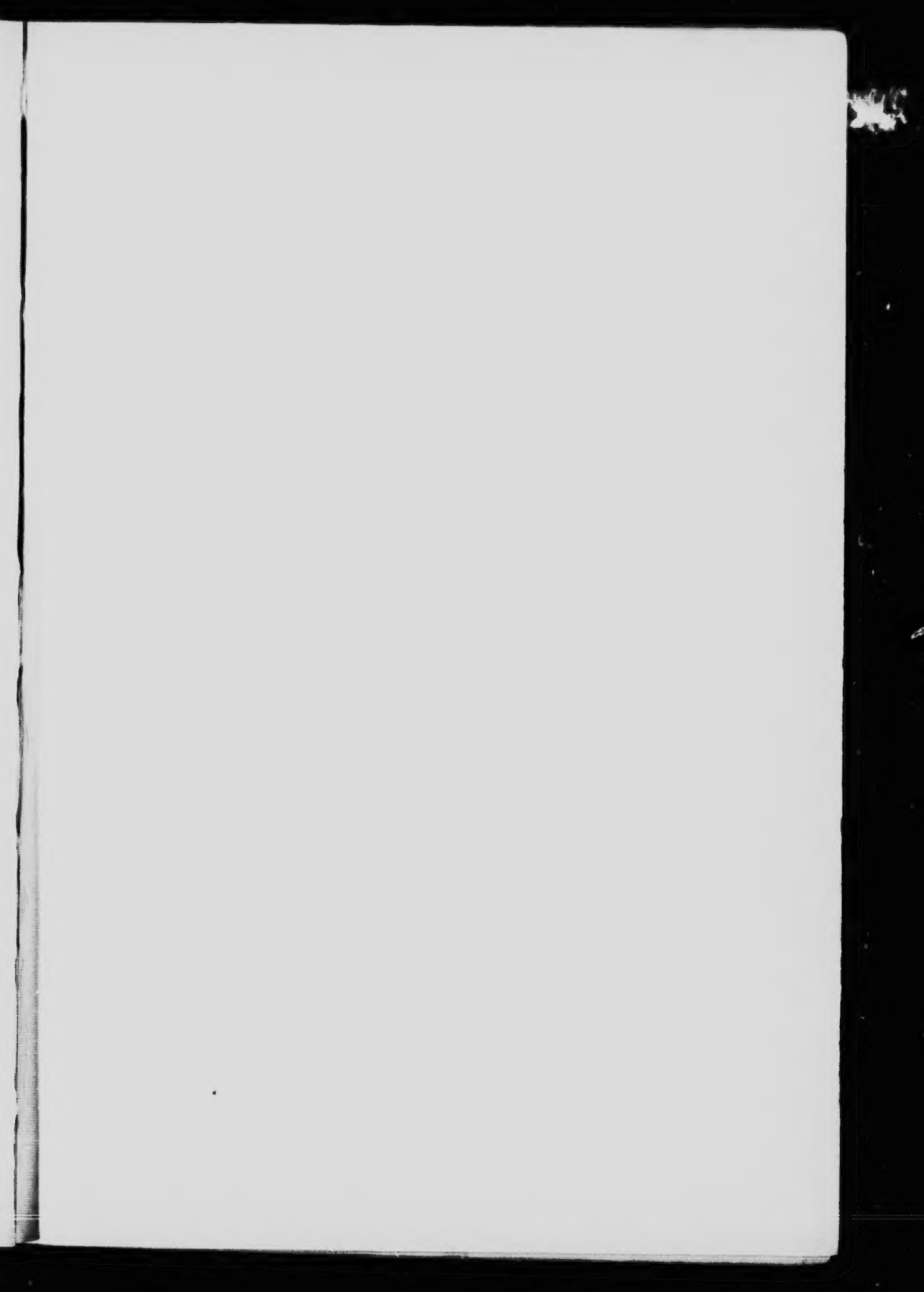
AMOS JUDD.

THAT FIRST AFFAIR
and Other Tales.

THE PINES OF LORY.

THE VILLA CLAUDIA.

THE SILENT WAR.





"WELL, HAV'N'T BUILT ME OVER"

DR THORNE'S IDEA

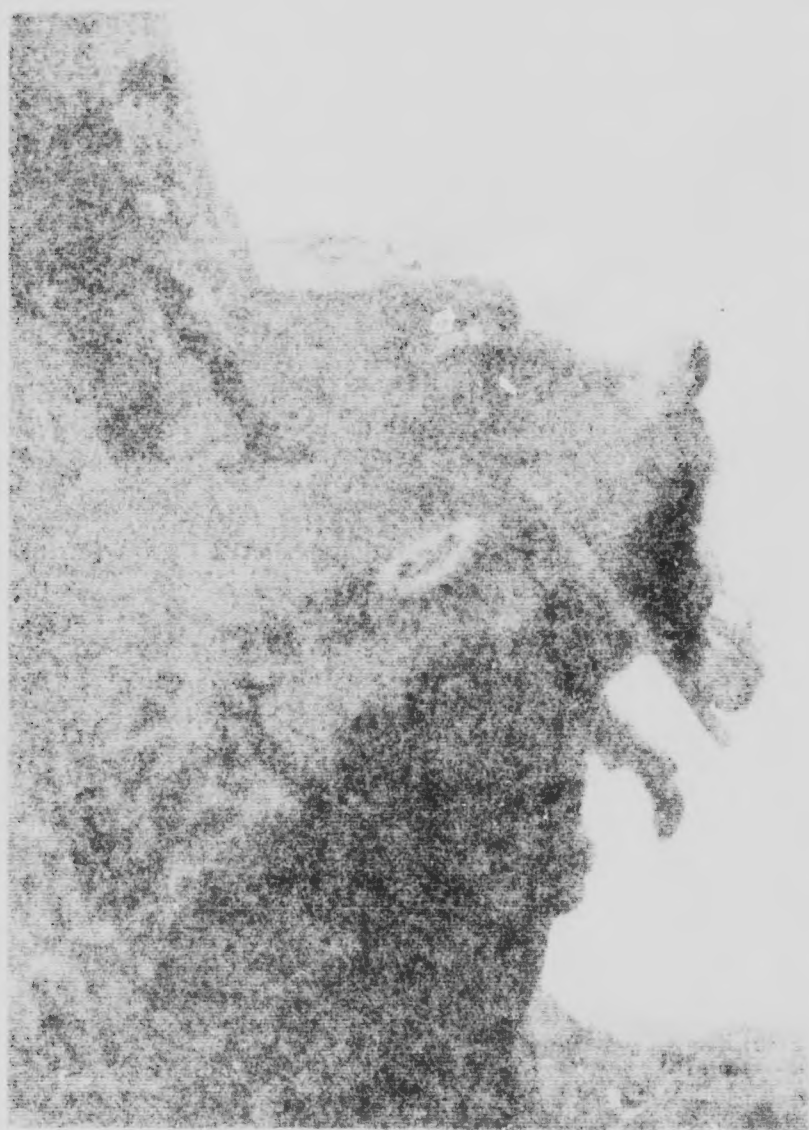
Originally Published as "Gloria Victis"

By
John Ames Mitchell

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BALFOUR KERR



Toronto
McLEOD & ALLEN
Publishers



DR THORNE'S IDEA

Originally Published as "Gloria Victis"

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PS 2479

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1910

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BY JOHN AMES MITCHELL

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ILLUSTRATIONS

BY BALFOUR KER

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"He would have pulled me over" . . . <i>Frontispiece</i>	
"All the muscles of the clinging body relaxed" . . .	66
"Both marched with drooping heads" . . .	169
"—and caught the outstretched hands" . . .	179



*This tale, in its original form,
was published in 1899 as Gloria
Victis.*

*With the addition of certain
passages and the revision of
others—a belated duty to Ste-
phen Wadsworth—the book is
now presented under a clearer
title.*

They say, best men are moulded out of faults.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

DR THORNE'S IDEA

I

ON Staten Island, in the garden before a modest cottage, a plump, sunburnt little girl was sitting among the flowers.

Her companion, a doll of uncertain character, whose champagne tresses and gaudy attire betokened a career of Gallic levity, or, at the very best, a purely fashionable existence, appeared strikingly out of harmony with her humble surroundings. This pretentious effigy, face down across her guardian's lap, was about to receive the punishment we associate with that attitude, when a voice from the road caused the uplifted hand to pause in its descent. A horse and buggy had stopped before the gate, and the driver repeated his question.

"Does Mrs. Zabarelli live here?"

"Yes, sir, but she's not at home."

"You expect her soon, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I guess so. At one o'clock."

The man climbed down from the vehicle, hitched

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his horse, and entered the yard. He wore a long linen duster buttoned from his throat to his ankles, leaving nothing of the other raiment visible except a white collar, the tips of his trousers, a straw hat, and a pair of russet shoes. His hair was gray, almost white, hanging thick about his ears; and he was very round-shouldered. Judging from appearances he might have been either forty-five or sixty years of age, his hair and figure seeming more venerable than his face. He was clean shaven, with thin lips, a rather sharp nose, and a strong jaw. Altogether he gave the impression of a conservative, indefinable citizen, who could have passed for anything from a book agent to the president of a trust company.

The child had struggled to her feet, and, as she stood regarding him, he stopped in front of her, looked down, and smiled. She returned the smile, and came a little nearer. She found, as many others had found, a fascination in this person's eyes. They were gray, and not remarkable except from their excessive honesty. Under all conditions they appeared sincere and frank; but when the owner smiled, the soul behind seemed to shine through and out, convincing you, in a way you had never realized before, that honesty—transparent, immaculate, incorruptible honesty—was, after all, the

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highest human attribute. As these translucent orbs beamed kindly upon the child, her young heart, under their supernal influence, expanded with a trustful love.

"Aren't you afraid of the sun, out here with no hat on?"

"No, sir; I like it."

He took out his watch and held it a moment, absorbed in a calculation.

"Did your mother say she would be back by one o'clock?"

"Yes, sir."

He appeared undecided, looking first toward the open door of the cottage, then over the opposite fields to the harbor beyond, where floated the fleet of every nation. The day was warm, but a gentle breeze from the water somewhat tempered the heat; not enough, however, to cool the rays of a blinding sun now directly overhead. The air near the earth quivered beneath the scorching light, and in this neglected garden stray bees and humming-birds, drunk with heat and honey, reeled blindly to and fro.

The visitor's glance, drawn by the brilliant colors, rested for a moment upon the pretentious doll, now pressed with loving care against its owner's stomach. Then, as if to aid his reflections, he opened his

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mouth a very little, drew in his lips, and slowly rubbed his chin. Perhaps the temperature of the garden hastened a decision, or it may have been the nature of his errand, for, with another smile to his young admirer, he turned and walked into the house.

Although a diminutive and somewhat uninviting room, the Zabarelli parlor at the present moment proved a welcome refuge. The air fluttered gently through the closed blinds, and the subdued light, after the outer glare, was soothing to the senses. This room bore indications of modest comfort; but the extreme simplicity of its furniture strengthened the impression already given by the exterior of the cottage that Poverty and the Zabarellis were close companions.

When the stranger entered this parlor, he seated himself upon a sofa at the further corner, facing the door. The little girl, who had followed close behind him, climbed into a rocking-chair and began to rock, arranging, as she did so, the skirts and head-gear of the frivolous foreigner, all accompanied by coquettish glances toward the visitor. But he seemed absorbed in his own reflections.

A long silence was broken only by the voices of birds from the neighboring trees, and by the occasional whistle of a distant steamer, hoarse and

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iron-throated, mingling with the shrieks of officious tugs as they darted hither and thither on their breathless, never ending business. At last he turned toward her, and again smiled pleasantly, —an easy thing to do as she was an attractive little person, whose laughing eyes and plump cheeks seemed to have brought some of the outer sunshine into the sober parlor. Besides, he was fond of children, and was himself a father.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Filippa Whitehouse Zabarelli."

"Whitehouse?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whitehouse is not Italian."

"Of course it isn't!" and she smiled as if amused at his ignorance. "Whitehouse is American. I am named Whitehouse after my grand-mamma."

"Oh, I see! After your mother's mother?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then your mother is not an Italian?"

"Oh, no! She is from Massachusetts."

"Ah, yes, I understand."

And he wondered if Mrs. Zabarelli's nationality would render his errand more difficult. He feared it might. From his own experience he was well

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aware of wide mental variations between the New England woman of Puritan descent and the Latin immigrant.

"Is that your father?" he asked, pointing to a large photograph that hung above the mantel.

"Yes, sir."

If this portrait was correct, Signor Udolfo Zabarelli was a good-looking man who had carried his nationality upon his face with superfluous emphasis. Short, black, stiff hair in aggressive abundance shot up from a low forehead, and was trimmed like the bristles of a brush—or a hawthorn hedge—in such a way that the top of his head could assume any shape desired by his barber. Alert eye-brows darting away from his nose at an upward angle gave a wide-awake expression to a firm but amiable countenance. There were indications of personal vanity of which he obviously was not ashamed, and which he took no pains to conceal. A diminutive, upturned mustache and a little black tuft beneath the lower lip completed the Italian effect.

The face seemed familiar to the visitor. He was trying to remember where he had seen it, when the little girl, who had stopped rocking and was also regarding the portrait, said in a lower voice,—

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"He only died a little while ago."

Then, after a pause, "My papa was very famous. He was a great artist. Did you ever see him?"

The visitor shook his head.

"It was lovely to see him dance."

Dance? Then he remembered. Yes, indeed, he had seen him dance; and then to the daughter he described the father as he appeared upon the stage,—how graceful he was, and how light upon his feet! His own head used to swim to see Zabarelli spin like a top for an indefinite period, on the very tips of his toes, then stop with a jerk. And as he stopped, facing the audience, he would bring his fingers to his lips with a triumphant smile, and throw kisses to the right and to the left.

His listener, as he spoke, slid down from her rocking-chair and came over and stood between his knees, a brown hand stroking the linen duster; and there was a happy pride in the moist, upturned eyes as she listened to these praises.

"Yes," she said in a subdued voice, with a touch of awe; "and mamma says there were ladies too, who danced about him, just like fairies."

"Yes, just like fairies;" and then he went on and told of her father's agility and of his wonderful effects,—of his flying about the stage, hither and thither, with tremendous bounds, a lady of the bal-

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let on either side. And these ladies, when he seized them by their waists, would spring high into the air, and then, as he held them at arm's length above his head, all a-quiver, like ethereal spirits, with their fluffy skirts and legs of dazzling pink, they would smile and wave their gleaming arms, slowly revolving like gorgeous lilies upon a sea of music.

Filippa, with wide-open eyes and parted lips, was listening enraptured, and expected more.

"But it is three or four years since I have seen him. Wasn't he ballet-master at the opera, later?"

"Yes; Maestro di Ballo. Do you know my uncle Guglielmo?"

"Goolyelmo?"

"Yes;" and she continued as if repeating a difficult lesson, "Guglielmo Onofredo Travaggini Biffi Titinnio Zabarelli."

"Is that all one uncle?"

"Yes; and he is a dancer like papa. And what do you think he says?"

"I couldn't guess."

"He says I may be a lady of the ballet, too, if I am good and graceful."

The visitor could not restrain a smile as he glanced down at the fat little figure, with its voluminous waist and manifold rotundities. And in

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the wide, cheerful face he detected a faint resemblance to the portrait on the wall.

"I have no doubt you will be good and graceful, and you will become taller and thinner as you get older, which will make it easier for you to dance."

"Oh, yes! I shall be a beautiful lady: like her!" and she held aloft the doll, who appeared, upon a closer acquaintance, even more disreputable than before.

"No, I hope not!" he exclaimed, regarding the showy personage, who, as their eyes met, startled him by a prolonged and brazen wink. This creature's eyes, originally designed to close when in a recumbent position, had become impaired by careless usage or by dissipation, and now moved independently of one another, each by its own mechanism, in a manner that could not fail to aggravate any unfavorable impressions already given.

"Why not?" and the child looked up at him with disapproval. Her hair is real, and her dress is silk; just feel of it! And look at her shoes! She—"

As Filippa spoke, a door opened in the adjoining room, toward the rear of the house, and the visitor, as if startled, pushed her roughly to one side and rose to his feet. She looked up at him in surprise.

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He seemed to have forgotten her presence, and was evidently disturbed. With three strides he crossed the little room, and seated himself upon a chair near the open door by which he had entered.

A woman's voice called,—

“Filippa!”

Filippa answered; but before she reached the door Madame Zabarelli entered.

The visitor found himself in the presence of a slight and rather pretty woman about thirty years of age. She was clad in the deepest mourning, and with her grave dark eyes, sensitive mouth, and rather prominent temples, gave the impression of an exceedingly earnest person; of one already familiar with the darker side of life, who took all things seriously, and had tasted the bitter with the sweet.

Finding a stranger in her little parlor, she stopped short in surprise; but after returning his ceremonious bow and the more effusive greeting of Filippa, she motioned him to be seated and awaited his errand. With her daughter standing by her side, she sat upon the sofa he had just quitted, watching him with expectant interest. For a moment he hesitated, as if searching for suitable language. But his hesitation was brief. When he spoke he smiled with fatherly benevolence upon his listener, who felt, as she looked into his truthful eyes, that she was in

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the presence of one upon whose integrity, at least, she could implicitly rely.

"I have come on a somewhat unusual errand, Madame Zabarelli, but it is one that need cause you no alarm. We merely desire, at the bank, to correct an oversight before it can cause you annoyance."

Her face at once became anxious; but he raised a hand as if to allay any possible uneasiness.

"Excuse my not introducing myself at the outset. My name is Elijah Folsom; I am one of the directors of our bank, as you very likely know."

She was not familiar with the names of the directors, which ignorance she indicated by an apologetic movement of the head.

"Some skilful rascal," he went on, "has palmed off upon our receiving teller over two thousand dollars in counterfeit one hundred dollar bills, and after making an examination, about an hour ago, we fear some of them are among the notes in your possession."

At this she arose in real alarm and began to unbutton her jacket. In doing this she loosened, unintentionally, a small gold chain to which a locket was attached.

"Lookout, mamma!" cried Filippa. "You are dropping your watch!"

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Thereupon Madame Zabarelli took from her pocket a heavy gold watch, of a foreign pattern, and laid it upon a little table by her side.

"But do not worry, madam," he protested. "If the bills are counterfeit, we shall make them good to you, no matter how many."

But Madame Zabarelli was not to be composed so easily. The mere thought of counterfeit money was, in her mind, so closely associated with crime and disaster that her fingers hastily continued their work, until, from the inner recesses of her waist, a roll of bills was extracted. These she unfolded in an agitated manner and placed in his hand. He arose, and, standing near the doorway with his back to the light, examined each note carefully, yet with a certain rapidity. As he came to the twelfth, he said, with a smile, and a gentle shake of his head,—

"It is wonderful how clever the rascals are. Every one of these bills is a forgery."

Madame Zabarelli's face expressed the most intense anxiety. But the eyes that met her own were so calmly reassuring, so brimming with paternal support, encouragement, and truth, that for a short moment she felt a happy relief. Being a woman, however, who gave thought to all things with tragic seriousness, and knowing this money was the last

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remnant of her husband's savings, the only barrier between herself and absolute poverty, her fears quickly returned.

"Shall I take them at once to the bank?" she inquired.

"Oh, no!" and placing them as he spoke in an inner pocket, he continued: "There is no necessity for that. I am going there now myself, and to-morrow when you call we will have the good money ready for you. Or, if you prefer, we will send it here the first thing to-morrow morning, or even this afternoon."

"But, sir, I could not sleep to-night feeling this money, all I have in the world, was out of my hands! And something might happen to you. I think—you will understand my feeling—that I will take it to the bank myself, and go at once."

"But this is not money," Mr. Folsom replied, taking up his hat. "These bogus bills are of no value whatever."

"They are my only proofs of having been paid by the bank in counterfeit money!" she exclaimed rapidly in a high, nervous voice.

He took a backward step into the hall, and was plainly at a loss for an answer. She extended her hand, and exclaimed in a more positive tone,—

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"I demand those bills, sir! They are mine, and it's for me to decide what becomes of them!"

"Do not make a scene, madame," he answered, still backing toward the front door. "I assure you there is no need of it."

But his paternal manner had departed. She saw that he meant to keep the money, and her anxiety turned swiftly to a hideous fear. This fear, however, while it blanched her cheeks and caused her eyes to dilate in a sudden horror, gave the force to act upon a quick resolve.

"I will call the neighbors, and we shall see!"

But Mr. Folsom was between herself and the outer door. Being a woman of spirit and decision, and determined to run no risks, she turned to her daughter, pointed toward the rear of the house, and cried,—

"Run, Filippa, and tell Mr. Kendrick to come as fast as he can! Quick!"

At this Mr. Folsom stepped hastily into the room. Madame Zabarelli shrunk back with an exclamation of horror, as he drew a revolver from an inner pocket and pointed it toward the child. The click of the hammer, as he cocked the weapon, seemed the voice of death. Filippa had started for the door, but her mother seized her by the arm and thrust the child behind her.

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"Are you a murderer?" she whispered.

He lowered the weapon.

"I am whatever is necessary to avoid a disturbance. If you care for your own life or for that of your child, you will not leave this house within an hour. Friends of mine are watching between here and your next neighbor. And they know what to do if you try to raise an alarm. I wish you no injury, but it rests entirely with yourself whether this interview ends peaceably or with bloodshed."

Madame Zabarelli was very pale; her breath came quickly, and she leaned for support on the back of the nearest chair. His story of the accomplices she believed. She straightened up, pressed a hand against her chest, and endeavored to be calm.

"Listen, sir, before you take that money. It is all I have in the world. It is all that is left of my husband's savings,—of our ten years of hard work,—of all our economy. Without it my child and I are paupers. We have nothing, absolutely nothing. With it I can buy an interest in a little business; but if you take it"—here her voice trembled and she seemed on the point of breaking down; then with a strong effort she continued, "but if you take it we are turned into the street, homeless, without a cent in the world."

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"Oh, that's all right," he interrupted. "I am sorry, of course, but business is business; and now that you know me better, don't be surprised if I add this to my collection;" and with a step forward he lifted her watch from the table.

"For Heaven's sake, leave me that!" and she thrust forth a trembling hand in protestation. With the other she threw back the long veil that had fallen before her eyes. Then, with quivering lips and a torturing effort to be calm, she went on in an agitated, uneven voice,—

"Leave me that watch! It was my dead husband's gift on our wedding day. To me it is more than money. I—I will send you its value if I can earn it; only—" At this point the tears came to her eyes and her voice broke.

The watch was dropped into an outer pocket of the voluminous duster; but as it disappeared, Filippa, in an excited, angry tone, cried out as she came between them:

"You are a wicked man to take that watch! What my mother says is true, and you ought to be ashamed!"

He looked down and smiled, but made no sign of returning the watch. As he again stepped toward the hall, Filippa, upon the impulse of a sudden thought, began tugging at one of her fingers.

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"Here! Take this! It is a ring my grandma gave me, and brings good luck to whoever wears it. Inside it says, 'God Bless the Wearer.' You take it and leave the watch;" and reaching high up above her head she thrust the ring toward him. He took it, and, thrusting aside the winding of thread that had been adjusted to fit Filippa's finger, he examined the inscription,—

To F. W. Z. God Bless the Wearer.

"Well," he answered with a ceremonious bow, looking down upon the upturned, angry eyes, half threatening, half entreating, "I cannot refuse an offer from such a fierce little lady;" and he returned the watch to Madame Zabarelli, who seized it with eager fingers.

"And now," he continued, with a respectful salutation, first to the mother and then to the child, "you must excuse me if I go. And remember my advice about leaving the house within an hour."

He turned, put on his hat, walked calmly out of the cottage and through the yard, unhitched his horse, climbed into the buggy, and drove briskly toward the town. Filippa stood in the doorway as he departed, watching him with sorrowful eyes. To lose her ring was a calamity, but it was a heavier

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blow that so nice a gentleman should turn out so badly.

Her mother, pale, faint, with trembling limbs, dropped upon the nearest chair, and buried her face in her hands. In another moment, however, she started to her feet, throwing back the heavy veil that had fallen about her cheeks. It occurred to her that the robber, from his pointing along the road when speaking of her nearest neighbor, knew nothing of the back entrance to the street behind. She consulted her watch. There was nearly an hour before the next ferry-boat left the island. She ran for Filippa's hat, tied it hastily upon the child's head, and without stopping to lock up the house, hurried through the kitchen, across the field behind, through the Kendricks' yard, and was just in time to get a horse-car to the town.

She would catch him yet! But, to her flying spirit, it seemed that no earthly conveyance ever moved so slowly. However, when she stopped at the police headquarters there was nearly half an hour to spare. Ten minutes later the alarm had been given, and she, with the superintendent himself, was at the wharf as the boat came in. They saw that no one went aboard before the arriving passengers had landed; then, in a shadowy corner, they waited for the thief.

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At that hour of the afternoon few people left the island for the city, and the watchers' task seemed easy. Of the dozen or more persons who came down the wharf and stepped aboard they saw no one who bore enough resemblance to the bogus Folsom to excite suspicion. Although the officer at her side impressed upon her the necessity of making the greatest allowance for disguises,—for age, gait, and figure; for wigs, false beards, for raiment, and even for expression,—she was positive that none who passed her could have impersonated the man she sought.

She scrutinized briefly and with little interest a man of thirty-five or forty, with short brown hair and erect figure, clad in a stylish suit of gray, who fanned himself with his hat as he stepped aboard. His near-sighted squint in peering through a pair of ill-fitting glasses would alone have allayed suspicion, for it was chiefly by Mr. Folsom's eyes that she was sure of knowing him.

But if Madame Zabarelli could have opened the little satchel this gentleman carried, her interest would have been considerably quickened by the discovery of a loaded revolver, a linen duster, and a gray wig.

II

WHEN this much desired traveller reached the city, he climbed the stairs of the Elevated road and entered a Third Avenue train. Had one been asked to indicate, among the passengers in this car, those who from physiognomy, manners, or apparel aroused a suspicion of dishonesty, Mr. James Wadsworth, alias Folsom, would not have figured in the list. His eyes alone would have debarred him from the competition. In manner he was dignified, reserved, and considerate of others. His garments were fashionable, but not showy; and although his head and neck were more suggestive of the "sport" than the student, there was something about the thin lips and clean-cut chin that recalled familiar portraits of eminent divines. In voice and language he appeared a cultivated man, which was natural enough, as he had received a liberal education and, for a brief period, had studied for the ministry. This was done under severe parental pressure, with intent to counteract, if possible, certain unspiritual

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tendencies which had begun to alarm his family. But while possessing in rare perfection the voice and facial qualifications for a holy calling, his moral machinery was an amusing burlesque upon any such design; so much so that he was thoroughly aware of it himself. In fact, he wasted little time in rectifying the paternal error. This he accomplished by removing to the city and applying his unusual gifts to the discomfiture of his fellow-men. His successes in these more congenial pastures were numerous, and, whenever possible, were obtained by gentlemanly methods. Of course, in a career where the law persists in opposing the will of a resolute citizen, cases occur in which benevolence is inexpedient; but for these Mr. Wadsworth was always sorry. His sorrow, however, never retarded his digestion or disturbed his sleep.

On this occasion, as he sat by the open window of the car, he felt a sorrow that Madame Zabarelli's inconsiderate perception had prevented his securing her money in a peaceful manner, as a director of the bank. It meant that one more victim familiar with his useful but compromising eyes was at large in the world, and that one more danger was forever before him.

At Fourteenth Street he left the train. After an errand on Broadway he returned toward the

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East side, along Twentieth Street. When at Gramercy Park, he saw coming in his direction, on the opposite side of the street by the iron fence, a pedestrian who seemed deep in thought. Mr. Wadsworth crossed over and stood before him.

"How are you, Foss?" he said.

"Hullo, Jim! I've just come from your house."

"Well, come back."

"No, I can tell you here;" and he stepped closer to the iron fence to make way for a pair of baby carriages with their attendant nurses.

Mr. Foster Graham was about fifty years of age, short, slight, and somewhat sporty in apparel. His dark skin appeared a little too loose for the bones of his face, particularly about the long, hard mouth, where it formed deep creases from the nose to the chin. There was something in the geography of these lines that suggested a sense of humor, although the habitual presence of a cigar, for whose security the mouth was perpetually elongated, may have increased this effect. Mr. Graham's eyes were a light gray, and they moved very slowly. Removing a freshly lighted and exceedingly strong cigar from his lips, he snapped away the ash and remarked:

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"They are onto us."

Then he replaced the cigar and wriggled it back into its corner, where it remained during the rest of the interview.

Over Mr. Wadsworth's face came the faintest indication of uneasiness, as he inquired:

"The watchman?"

His companion answered by an affirmative nod, and, turning about, faced the iron fence. As the two men stood looking through the railing upon the children who played upon the grass within, Mr. Wadsworth tightened his lips and drew a hand across his chin, as Filippa had observed a few hours before. But this time he was facing a far more disquieting possibility than his errand with Madame Zabarelli was likely to create. Two months before this interview, about three in the morning, as these two friends were endeavoring to open the safe of a prominent financial institution in a certain New Jersey town, they were surprised by the watchman of the building. All details of the interview were still a mystery; but the discovery a few hours later of the dying watchman with a broken skull convinced his employers that he had died in defense of their property. As he left a wife and four children and was a general favorite with all who knew him, his sudden decease had aroused con-

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siderable feeling. While the would-be robbers failed in the real object of their visit, no public sympathy had thus far been expressed for them. Although an exceptionally large reward was offered for their persons, up to the present moment Mr. Wadsworth had not worried over the business, as he and his partner could think of no evidence likely to be brought against them. He always regretted violence; but in this case the responsibility rested, of course, with the intruder.

"What is it?" he inquired. "What have they got?"

"You remember the milkman we had to ask about the trains?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's a fly mug. He turns out to be one of them smart people that see and remember every damned thing that comes within a mile of 'em."

"Could he describe us?"

"Describe us! There ain't a tooth in yer mouth nor a button on yer clothes—under-clothes, too—that he didn't make a note of. God! if I had known what a million-eyed rooster he was, I'd 'a' given him the whole State for leeway!"

There was a silence, during which the two men stood looking through the bars. Mr. Wadsworth took off his hat and fanned himself.

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"What did he say of us?"

"He said a lot. He sized me up from head to heel. Hair, eyes, nose, wrinkles, clothes, voice, teeth, finger-joints, cravat, warts, buttons, chain, every damned thing that a man can carry, he got; and he got it straight."

Here the creases at the unoccupied end of Mr. Graham's mouth formed themselves into a smile, and with a twinkle in his eyes he moved them slowly toward his companion.

"And his catchin' on to you would make a hen laugh. He said the tallest man of the two didn't look like a thief; he looked like a lawyer, except his eyes were too honest."

Mr. Wadsworth smiled, but the smile was not gleeful. He remembered that yet another description of his eyes was probably on its way from Staten Island. His companion added,—

"Them optics 'll be the hangin' of you yet, Jim. Better leave 'em home next time you travel for yer health."

"I will. Where did you get all this?"

"From Fatty Barr, straight. You know he's at headquarters, sort of a clerk, and he copied off the testimony. But what puts a move on me more'n anything is that two fellers came into Brennan's the other day, and asked when I was most

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likely to be there; and as Brennan recognized one of 'em for the man who spotted Ikey Turnbull last year, I ain't likely to be there very regular just now."

"What's your scheme, Foss?"

"To git. To-morrow morning I'm on the briny. I advise you to get a move on you, too, and damn sudden."

Mr. Wadworth appeared to be thinking, and again drew in his lips and slowly rubbed his chin. Turning his back to the fence, he said,—

"I am hoping the next time we meet there won't be so many iron bars just in front of us. They hurt the view."

"Every time."

"Where are you going?"

"To South America and you'd better join the procession."

"Can't. I've got a wife and boy on my hands."

Mr. Graham laid a finger on his partner's chest and said seriously, with a grave face:

"Now don't you linger, Jim. It's gitt'n' hotter every twenty minutes, and they're likely to close in on you. Take my advice. Better be a live man in Brazil than a dead one in the bosom of yer family."

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"Right you are! I'll settle up things and light out. What's your address down there?"

Mr. Graham wrote three lines upon a piece of paper and handed it to his friend. "Be sure and don't put my name on that; they might find it on you."

"You needn't worry. By the way, Foss, it's four hundred I owe you, isn't it?" and from an inner pocket he took out a roll of crisp, new bills.

"Oh, that's all right. 'Tain't what I went to your house for."

"I know it, but there's a chance of our not meeting again where money's any good; and you might as well take it now."

"Thank you."

Then, as he noticed the roll was composed of one-hundred-dollar notes, he added,—

"Had a graft, I guess."

"Yes, but don't let on, as I had trouble in fetching it and may hear from the job. It comes in mighty well, though, for things look as if I might need it. These sudden changes are expensive."

With the side of his mouth that was away from the cigar Mr. Graham smiled.

"It only proves there's a Providence. God looks out for his pet lambs."

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Mr. Wadsworth also smiled, this time with more enjoyment.

"Yes," he said, "the Lord is generous if you work him right, and when we get to Brazil we'll continue our labors in the vineyard."

Here Mr. Graham, without removing his cigar, brought the tips of his ten fingers together with a clerical gesture, and remarked with pompous dignity,—

"And I have long felt, Brother Wadsworth, that the holy gospel should not be withheld from the wealthy heathen."

Then with smiling faces they shook hands and parted, not to meet again this side the Styx.

As Mr. Wadsworth continued his homeward journey, still to the eastward, his thoughts were disquieting. He knew Foss Graham too well to doubt the truth of the information just received, and were it not for his family, he would be on the open sea to-night. But so sudden a departure needed skilful explanations.

Passing through Stuyvesant Square, he seated himself upon an empty bench to decide on the style of fiction Mrs. Wadsworth would be most likely to accept. His hat he laid upon the seat beside him; and soon the cool shade, the rustling of the leaves above his head, together with the voices

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of children at their play, produced a soothing effect upon nerves still calm and firm, but which had already that day twice experienced a fatiguing tension.

He might have floated off into a gentle slumber were it not for the somewhat stirring news he had just received. Even a man of Mr. Wadsworth's temperament finds it difficult to attain a perfect peace of mind with the shadow of the gallows too distinctly outlined across his path. His eyes closed, however, and, as thus he reclined, the outward effigy of a tranquil soul, his brain, of a sudden, awoke in swift alarm, and all his senses became painfully acute. Behind him he heard stealthy footsteps upon the gravel walk, of some one cautiously approaching. Mr. Wadsworth was a man of swift resolves and decisive action, but this time he felt the game was up. He made no motion; even his eyes remained closed. The man behind him, if the one he feared, was sure to be armed, and sure to be accompanied by a mate. They always came in pairs. And when a hand fell heavily upon his shoulder, an involuntary tremor shot up his spine and died frigidly away among the nerves of his scalp. If a passer-by had bent down and peered close into his face, he might have seen less color than usual about his lips; but no muscles moved. Judging from appearances, his cherubic slumbers

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were undisturbed. Inwardly there was sudden despair. Before him he saw a long trial with damning evidence and certain death,—the death of a common criminal,—and he thought of his wife and his boy; but all was instantaneous,—a swift prophetic flash, like a knife through a desperate heart.

But from this despair he was swiftly elevated to an ecstatic relief, and all by another movement of the hand upon his shoulder. It crept slowly toward his neck, and fingers that he now recognized as those of a child travelled playfully about his ears. He yielded, however, to no nervous impulses, for Mr. Wadsworth was a "dead game sport." He was the last man to display outward symptoms of his inward joys—or of his tribulations.

"Steve," he said quietly.

"Did I scare you, pop?" came in a child's voice; and a boy of ten stepped out from behind the seat and stood before him.

Mr. Wadsworth smiled an affectionate welcome into a pair of eyes exactly like his own. They were fully as honest, even more so if possible, bearing the same glad tidings of a soul overladen with truth, from which the Heaven-born light, pure and invigorating, shed forth support and guidance for less immaculate mortals. Like his father, these eyes

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were his striking feature; otherwise his face bore nothing unusual to impress a stranger. He had the fresh, wholesome complexion of those who are fond of exercise and whose digestions are friendly.

When he smiled, and his smile came easily as from an open nature, the honest eyes joined in and formed an irresistible harmony. In the presence of such a combination prolonged hostility, or even suspicion, was impossible. The smile possessed an inviting quality, creating in the beholder a strong desire for further and more intimate relations with its owner. This inheritance, so successfully transmitted from the father to the son, was of priceless value to one ordained, by instinct and by education, for the beguilement and circumvention of his fellow creatures. It might appear that a compensating Providence had bestowed these efficient weapons in atonement for certain moral deficiencies.

This boy had also inherited a splendid physique. Erect, deep-chested, and broad-shouldered, he stood firmly on his feet, and had already begun to have that solid look about the legs and shoulders that we associate with the professional gymnast. His straightness was not from any effort of his own, but because the compensating Providence had so

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constructed. The expression of his face was cheerful and alert, more responsive and sympathetic than his father's; less hard about the mouth, and the lips were fuller and with gentler curves.

Mr. Wadsworth regarded the figure before him with grateful relief. And besides, he was proud of his son. He was proud of his strength, of his self-reliance and his pluck. He knew him to possess qualities in which he himself was deficient, some of which he admired; others he did not fully understand, and of these he was a little afraid.

"Did I scare you, pop?"

"I nearly fainted."

The boy laughed and laid a hand on his father's knee.

"Well, you didn't know at first who it was, anyway!"

"No; I thought it might be—King Edward. But his fingers are cleaner than yours, I'm thinking. How did you bark your knuckle?"

The boy looked at his fist, then drew a handkerchief from his pocket and endeavored to remove the stains.

"That's a nice, fresh-looking handkerchief," his father remarked. "Been wiping up the street with it?"

As the grime and gore were transferred from

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the hand to the many-tinted cloth one or two small cuts were disclosed, which were still bleeding.

"How did you do it?"

As no answer came, it was evident to the father, who knew his son, that the issue was being dodged. With a frown he asked,—

"Been fighting again?"

"No; not a real fight."

"How was it?"

"Over in the other square, a little while ago. I was coming through, and saw a quarter rolling along, right in the walk. When I picked it up and shoved it in my pocket, the little chap what was chasing it—"

"Who was chasing it?"

"—who was chasing it, began to kick up a row to have it back. He was a little dude, dressed like a sailor, with long yellow hair;" and on the narrator's face there came a smile of contemptuous pity. "Just as I lit out to get away from his yellin' a feller caught me by the collar, behind. I twisted round, and there was a sucker, that high, a grocer's boy, with a basket;" and he held a hand about a foot above his own head.

His father smiled. "Luck was against you that time, old man."

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"No, it wasn't!" said the boy, with a slow twist of the head. "He told me to hand back the quarter, and I said I wouldn't. Then there was chin-nin', but I didn't bull-doze for a cent, and he just hauled off and let me have one between the eyes. But it didn't hurt anybody. Then I plunked him three or four peaches, one of 'em on the mouth, and his teeth cut me. I left him sitting on a seat trying to keep his face clean."

Mr. Wadsworth's impassive face gave no outward sign of his pride in this achievement, as he did not believe in too much fighting either among boys or men. There was nothing to gain by it.

"And you have spent the quarter already, I suppose."

"No, sir; not yet."

There was something in the manner of the reply that suggested prevarication.

"Let's see it."

"What?"

"The quarter."

The young athlete searched through every pocket, then fixed the superlatively honest eyes upon those of his parent, and exclaimed,—

"Jiminy! I've lost it!"

But the senior Wadsworth had known these eyes

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from infancy. Besides, he had a similar pair himself, and he was not deceived.

"Steve, is that whole yarn a fake?"

"No, pop! straight and honest, it ain't."

"It *isn't*, you mean."

"It isn't."

"Then where's the quarter?"

For a moment the youth looked half ashamed. Then he made a reluctant confession.

"Well, as long as I had licked the big feller, and the little one felt so broke up over it, I just gave his money back to him."

Mr Wadsworth looked away and appeared interested in a passing citizen. This was not the first time his son had yielded to a foolish sentiment and lost his hard-earned gains. He could hardly scold him for it, and yet such ideas, if they became a habit, must of necessity be an obstacle to success. Steve saw, as he anticipated, that he had dimmed the glory of his victory.

Mr. Wadsworth rose to his feet and took out his watch.

"Nearly five o'clock. We must be getting home."

As they walked away together, hand in hand, out of the park and along an adjacent street, the boy maintained a conversation touching on many sub-

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jects, but in which his companion took but a fitful interest. For Mr. Wadsworth had much to think of. There are many things to be adjusted before a father can leave his home forever, especially at sudden notice; and in this case there were outside complications not likely to hamper the usual citizen. His wife caused him more embarrassment at the present crisis than any other features of the dilemma. He was a good husband, and reasonably fond of her; and she was the mother of Steve, whom he loved even better than himself; but he anticipated trouble, not so much because of her unvarying and unassailable selfishness, but because, of all women who had thus far come upon this earth, she was, in all human probability, the most tempestuous and unreasonable.

The Wadsworth home, on the ninth floor of a pretentious but cheaply-constructed apartment house a short distance from Stuyvesant Square, consisted of a sitting-room, two chambers, and a bath-room. The small chamber was occupied by Steve, the larger one by his parents. All were on the rear of the building, looking south; and the view from the windows included the entire city to the south, the rivers on the east and west, a portion of the harbor, all of Brooklyn, and the distant hills in New Jersey. The interior of the apartment was

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less inspiring. In the sitting-room, plush furniture, cheaply made and of showy colors, had become shabby and uninviting. The carpet showed a lighter shade in diverging paths around the centre-table, and in places near the window the boards beneath were visible. Along certain spaces of shelves and tables the dust was undisturbed. A large gilt clock upon the mantel had received a blow from some flying object that had shattered its face and discouraged its interior. The two chambers were furnished in corresponding taste, and were administered by the same housekeeper.

Upon entering the sitting-room and finding no one there, Mr. Wadsworth asked Stephen if he happened to know where his mother had gone.

"No; only that she got on that car."

"What car?"

"Why, the Second Avenue car."

"When?"

"Why, pop, I told you on the way over that I saw her getting on to a car about an hour ago."

"I didn't hear you. Was she alone?"

Steve turned his eyes away; then, with a side glance toward his father, shook his head in the negative.

"Wallace?"

Steve bobbed his head.

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Mr. Wadsworth muttered something, and his face took an unpleasant expression. He was a man who controlled his feelings; and as he tossed his hat upon a sofa and strode into the adjoining chamber, Stephen knew that his anger was deeper than it appeared. Mr. Wallace, the leading tenor in a second-rate theatre, was a person of neither beauty, intelligence, nor physique; but with hair and voice he was lavishly endowed. His raven locks, curly and somewhat longer than fashion required, excited no envy in other men, but upon the female heart they took a powerful hold. So also with his voice. Male members of the audience waited in patient silence until his song was finished, and were happier when the end arrived; but the average woman hung with passionate thirst upon his blatant, reedy notes, and yearned to possess him. He appeared seriously in love with Mrs. Wadsworth; and as Mrs. Wadsworth was certainly no stronger or more discriminating than the average woman, her husband had excellent reasons for becoming anxious. In vain he pointed out the dangers of the situation. More than once he had argued with her kindly and not in anger, and she had promised to forego the tenor; but the promise was hard to keep, and Mr. Wadsworth became the victim of some discouraging suspicions.

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When he reappeared, some moments later, in his shirt-sleeves, he returned the smile with which Stephen greeted him. Seating himself by the open window, he took a little gold ring from his pocket.

"Here's a present for you, Steve."

His son approached and leaned against the paternal knees.

"A gold ring?"

"Yes, and one that will bring luck to whoever wears it."

As he spoke, he was cutting with his penknife the silken thread that had been laboriously wound about it.

"What's all that thread for?"

"To make it fit the one who owned it before."

"He must have been a mighty small boy!"

"It wasn't a boy; it was a girl."

"Did she give it to you?"

"Yes."

With the silk removed it was found to be a perfect fit for Stephen's smallest finger. He slipped it on and off, held it up at various angles, and was pleased with his present. He discovered the inscription along the inside and read it aloud: "'To F. W. Z. God Bless the Wearer.' What does F. W. Z stand for, pop?"

"Perhaps the initials of some other owner; but

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you wear it, and always keep it on your finger. As you get bigger a jeweller can let it out a little. Don't take it off any more than you have to."

"All right; I'll never take it off."

"And if your mother should notice and ask about it, or want to take it in her hand, why, tell her you can't get it off. Tell her you found it in the street."

Before placing it finally on his finger, Steve read again the loving legend.

"God'll bless me right along, won't he? all the time I wear it?"

"Very likely."

"That'll be a good thing. Won't it?"

"I should think so."

"How does it work? How'll I be different?"

"It will bring you luck, and—and make you good."

The boy reflected.

"There's no use in being *too* good."

"No, not in this world."

III

AN hour later they still awaited Mrs. Wadsworth's return. It was half-past six, and both were hungry. The father, sitting near the door, was looking over papers, destroying those whose testimony he considered dangerous. Upon the table before him stood a bust, the size of life, of a famous pugilist. This was done in plaster, but smeared with an unpleasant tint suggesting bronze; merely a suggestion, however, as no one could be misled. Steve, the owner now lounging near the window absorbed in the biography of a distinguished train-robber, had won it in a raffle, and valued it far above dollars.

At last a key was inserted in the outer door; then a showy presence filled the room.

One glance at Stephen's mother would explain the infatuation of many Wallaces. A magnificent physical triumph, Mrs. Wadsworth seemed more than enough to turn the head of the diminutive tenor, a man with neither length, breadth, nor digestion; nor even passable legs. Tall, and beautifully

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proportioned, she was also perfectly erect, with a splendid carriage. This she had bequeathed to Stephen, his best inheritance from his mother. Her features were those of an Olympian goddess; her eyes were handsome. In fact, nothing seemed forgotten in her physical outfit. But she herself had lived exclusively upon these gifts. Her expression was neither amiable nor contented; the roses in her cheeks were painted by a heavier hand than that of her Creator, and her hair was that golden yellow which deceives no one but the wearer.

As she stepped to the centre-table and removed an elaborate hat with crimson plumes, her husband was reminded of Filippa's doll. To a doubting spouse it was not a soothing resemblance, and his face expressed his thought. She caught the look, and remarked, in the manner of one who has a chip upon the shoulder,—

“Well, what are you ugly about?”

“I am not ugly, but it is pretty tough on any man to have his wife stumping around the town with a thing like Wallace.”

She looked across the table into the mirror, and, adjusting the yellow locks with hands that glistened with enormous jewels, replied, with assumed indifference,—

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"I don't know what you mean. I ain't seen him for a week."

"You went off with him about three hours ago in a Second Avenue car."

She appeared surprised, and her expression became less indifferent.

"Did I, really?"

"You did."

"I thought you were the man who went out of town to-day."

"I did."

"Then who told you that lie?" and the handsome eyes became hard as they turned with an ominous glitter toward the boy at the window.

"I saw you myself."

"Then you got back in season to sneak around after your wife for a while."

Mr. Wadsworth made a strong effort to control himself.

"Look here, Fanny," he said in a calm tone, as he arose and stood facing her, "that's a poor bluff. You are bringing trouble on yourself and shame to the rest of us. That sort of thing doesn't go down. You've got to stop it right here."

She raised her chin and looked him coldly in the face.

"You don't say so."

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Mr. Wadsworth made another effort to keep his temper; slowly, and in a harder voice he answered,—

“I do say so; and this time I mean it. I don't share my wife with any half-grown, bleating, hairy freak.”

At this epithet a change came over Mrs. Wadsworth's face that caused her husband's expression to turn swiftly from anger to apprehension. It also brought Stephen to his feet. This lady's tempers were more than disastrous, they were destructive; and when they occurred all other business in her vicinity was hastily abandoned. But their violence and their frequency had developed a systematic treatment on the part of her present companions which was applied not only for their own preservation but for that of the furniture. So, when her face became suddenly a ghastly white, with no trace of color save the two painted spots upon her cheeks, and this pallor as swiftly drowned in a crimson flush as though her blood were bursting through the skin, then the father exchanged a hasty glance with his son, and both moved cautiously toward her, each from his own end of the table. The woman before them, insane for the time being from the intensity of a resistless, unreasoning fury, still retained the instincts of a beast at bay. Seizing a

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roller skate that lay upon the table, she hurled it with accurate aim and with murderous force at the head of her approaching husband. He dodged it, and it struck the noted pugilist full across the mouth, smashing him into hopeless chaos. Quickly she reached for the companion missile and raised it aloft; but before it could depart, Mr. Wadsworth had sprung to her side and seized both her wrists. Steve in the meantime, and with equal promptness, dropped to his knees at her feet, threw his arms about the maternal legs, his face deep buried in her skirt, and held her with an iron grip. Then the husband and the son, with the ease and precision that come from practice, brought her gently to the floor.

She also had learned from experience: she had learned, among other things, that against these two athletes resistance was of no avail. But her tongue was free. Mr. Wadsworth, while holding her as gently as possible, became the recipient of curses so emphatic, so varied, and so ingeniously insulting as to have been insupportable had they come from other lips. But he was well aware that the woman who uttered them had become an irresponsible being; a fact also recognized with filial sympathy by the son, although he clutched her knees with an unyielding grip.

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In two or three minutes, when safety permitted, Mr. Wadsworth loosened his hold, Steve followed his example, the lady climbed slowly to her feet, and the family relations, to all appearance, continued as before.

It was a hard thing to live with, this temper, and the day was one of sorrow for Mr. Wadsworth when he first discovered what a cruel heritage had fallen to his son. With all a father's affection for an only child—and for this boy his love was greater than for himself—he endeavored by every means within his knowledge at first to suppress, and finally to reason with and to control these outbursts. But the reward was meagre; for the boy, although himself ashamed of and ever doing his best to avert them, was powerless to conquer. They overtook him, these spasms of fury, not often, but with sufficient frequency to reclaim their victim, and to show him that human vigilance was of no avail. Between himself and Mrs. Wadsworth, however, existed an important distinction: the mother after these attacks remained sullen and vindictive. With the son there was an eagerness to make the fullest atonement.

Half an hour later, when they quitted the apartment and walked to a neighboring restaurant for dinner, no observer would have presumed to sus-

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pect this stately and pretentious female of her recent behavior. During the meal she showed no signs of resentment, and her amiability caused her two companions not only an unwonted pleasure but a mild surprise. This amiability was the result of a swift decision. Behind loving smiles and cheerful conversation she was perfecting a plan by which to paralyze the wicked and reward the virtuous, all by a single, sudden action, splendidly dramatic in its irreparable results. Her external sweetness was ably maintained until the hour for action; and the hour for action was close at hand.

At the door of the apartment house Mr. Wadsworth left them, saying it would be late in the evening before he returned. He noticed that his wife's expression was one of unusual gentleness; and had his knowledge of her character been less complete, he might have laid it to affection, or, at least, to self-forgetfulness. But, whatever the cause, it was unfamiliar, and he recalled it later.

Upon entering the apartment Mrs. Wadsworth, without removing her hat, went directly to a desk and wrote a note. After sealing and directing it, she came toward Steve, who occupied his favorite perch at the window, absorbed in the "Lives of Famous Robbers."

"Steve, I want you to take this—" Then she

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hesitated, and, remembering his fidelity to his father, decided that in this emergency he was not to be trusted.

"Ring for the elevator," she said in a harder voice; and she passed into the adjoining chamber.

When the elevator arrived she herself took out the note, and Steve heard her say to the boy,—

"Give this to a messenger at once, and tell him he will get an extra quarter for a quick answer."

In less than half an hour the answer came. After reading it she turned to Stephen with her sweetest smile, and inquired if he would like to go to the theatre this evening. The reply, as anticipated, was an emphatic affirmative. She placed a fifty-cent piece in his hand, and told him to select his own performance. He was surprised, but lost no time in waiting, and at once departed, marvelling at this uncommon but delightful exhibition of a mother's love.

When he returned, three hours later, the rooms were dark and silent. He stepped to the doorway of her chamber and whispered,—

"Ma."

No answer came. Then he spoke again in a louder voice, but there was no response. The voiceless gloom of the apartment seemed a living thing, concealing some mysterious calamity. But

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Stephen's nerves were not of the kind that flutter. He struck a match and lit the gas. Over the floor, upon the bed and chairs, were scattered various articles of woman's clothing,—here a skirt and there a hat, with occasional shoes and undergarments; bedclothes, pillows, newspapers, and empty hat-boxes. The bureau drawers were open and empty; the closet doors were open, and the closets were empty. The contents of the room had been thoroughly overhauled.

He was puzzled, and for a moment suspected a robbery; but where was his mother? Robbers could never take *her* away. Tucked in the mirror above the bureau was a folded paper. Going nearer, he read the address, MR. JAMES WADSWORTH, in his mother's writing. He pulled it out and opened it.

DEAR JIM,—You and I don't hit it very well, and I leave you for somebody who understands me better, and you needn't try to follow me, because I shall be miles away from this town when you read these lines. You can have Steve. I am writing this in great haste; so good-by from

FANNY WADSWORTH.

Steve read this twice, very slowly, for its full significance was difficult to grasp. But he finally understood. She had left dad and him for Wallace! Refolding the paper, he tucked it in the frame of the mirror where he had found it, then he walked back to the sitting-room window, and, leaning over

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the sill in his favorite position, looked out over the sleeping city. It seemed vaster than ever, and farther below him.

He took no interest in the rising moon or its shimmering light upon the river to the east. With indifferent eyes he gazed upon the silvery flood that illumined the towering sentinels of the Brooklyn Bridge, and touched in the far obscurity, with familiar greeting, the watching goddess in the harbor. Beyond these, and beyond the limits of his vision, he tried to peer into the darkness, wondering in which direction his tempestuous parent had flown. And he wondered if, in the city below, there were many boys whose mothers had also run away. Perhaps it was a common thing. He hoped so. She was not a perfect mother, but he recalled the kind things she had done for him, making a gallant effort to forget the unpleasant ones,—to forget that she had never given him the care and attention that other boys seemed to get from their mothers; that his clothes were never mended unless the janitress or a tailor saw to them; and that more than once she had punished him because she was angry with his father. These things he tried to forget, remembering only that she was his mother, and that she was gone.

But it cut him to the heart that she should give

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him up so easily. "You can have Steve." The words were cruel, and he could not help repeating them.

His eyes were moist as he left the window, and they were still moist, some minutes later, when, in a buttonless night-shirt, he threw himself upon his bed. The night was warm, too warm for sleep, and he felt like going out into the streets and hunting for his father.

At one o'clock he was still awake, and he heard a key in the door. Jumping from bed, he ran out into the parlor to welcome his remaining parent.

As Mr. Wadsworth entered the unlighted room, he could barely distinguish the white figure by the center-table. He stopped short as Steve, in a solemn voice, announced,—

"Ma's gone! She's run off with Wallace."

It was too dark to see distinctly, but Steve knew his father was compressing his lips and drawing a hand across his mouth.

"She left a letter for you, sticking in the mirror;" and the white sleeve of a night-shirt pointed toward the chamber.

Into the next room walked father and son, the latter sitting upon the edge of the bed, crossing and uncrossing his bare legs as he watched his sire with a sympathetic gaze, and saw him turn up the light,

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then take the letter from its place and read it. Although he knew this parent well, he was surprised to see him receive such momentous tidings with no change of expression. He merely drew in his lips and passed a hand across his chin,—as usual when there was food for reflection,—and then quietly laid aside his coat and vest and loosened his collar.

Seating himself in a rocking-chair, he questioned Steve for further information; but there was little to be learned. As his glance encountered a jewel-box, overturned and empty, upon the bureau, he picked it up and muttered, with a mirthless smile upon his lips:

“The poor things won't realize heavily on their jewelry.”

Steve failed to comprehend; but as the joke on Wallace was evidently too good to be suppressed, the father continued,—

“When I gave your mother her engagement ring, I was flush and I laid myself out on it. It cost me two hundred dollars. I found accidentally, a year or two after we were married, that she had realized on the two-hundred-dollar diamond, and substituted an imitation. But she has never suspected that I know it.”

At this point Steve came over and stood between his knees.

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"Well, as your mother showed such a preference for paste, I have given her several handsome specimens of it since. Every Christmas, New Year's, and on all her birthday's, she has received precious stones that must aggregate, in her opinion, about three thousand dollars. And I have made a point of examining them carefully, now and then, in her presence, all but the engagement ring, to let her see that if any of them were changed, I should be sure to discover it."

Laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, he added, with an exultant twinkle in the superlatively honest eyes,—

"If you ever run away with another man's wife, Steve, and are counting on a nice little fortune, I hope it won't pan out for less than thirty dollars."

Although Steve had a poor opinion of Mr. Wallace, his sympathies were too much with his mother to permit a thorough enjoyment of her defeat.

"But it's hard on ma, ain't it?" he asked.

"You mean, *isn't* it."

"*Isn't* it?"

"Of course it is; but if people——"

A loud knock at the outer door brought Mr. Wadsworth to his feet with a suddenness that nearly sent Stephen to the floor. In surprise, the boy

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looked up at his father, and saw that his eyes were turned savagely in the direction of the sound, that his lips were tightened and his hands clenched. Silently and swiftly Mr. Wadsworth slipped on his vest and coat, then tiptoed through the parlor, and listened near the outer door. Steve followed, and they heard a voice, of one man speaking to another, in a muffled tone. As silently as before, his father stepped back, away from the door, toward the window, and, resting a hand on each of Stephen's shoulders, he bent down and said in a tone that no one else should hear,—

"Steve, they have got me, and you won't see your dad again. I must go with them; there's no help for it. And all because I am a fool,—the damnedest of all damned fools;" and he straightened up with an angry gesture.

"But, dad," whispered Steve, "ain't there something I can do? Can I—" Here a knock louder than before was followed by a heavy, impatient voice.

"Open the door, Mr. Wadsworth. We know you are inside."

"Can't I get in the way, or something?" Steve went on. "I can do it, dad! I can do whatever you say!"

Mr. Wadsworth looked down at the muscular lit-

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tle figure in its airy garment, and it brought an idea. His face brightened.

"Could you grab one of those men by the legs, as you do your mother, and hold him long enough for me to manage the other chap?"

"Yes! Yes! Easy!"

"If you can do that, Stevey, you'll save your father. Now, be sure and jump for the one I point at—in this way—and go for him just when I point. Is it understood?"

"Yes," Steve whispered, "and I'll hang till death."

His father touched his lips to his adherent's cheek. "Go to Charley Myers every day,—you know him?"

"Yes, the saloon."

"Go to him every day for a week, until—here a series of knocks heavier than the others was followed by threats of breaking down the door—" until you hear from me. Now open the door; and keep close to the man who first comes in."

It was skilfully planned; but its execution demanded presence of mind, some physical strength, and unshrinking courage. Mr. Wadsworth had participated in similar affairs, and could rely upon himself; but his present backer was as yet untried. However, as Stephen in his snowy vestment strode

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calmly toward the resounding door, he gave promise of these essentials.

When he opened the door, a man of heavy build, without waiting for any words, pushed roughly by him into the dusky parlor. And as he paused to get his bearings, the ghostly figure that followed close upon his heels moved swiftly to his front.

"Jim Wadsworth, you are my prisoner." Then the father, who had purposely lingered in a shadowy corner, stepped out into the room.

For answer, he raised an arm toward the intruder, and with extended finger said calmly in his usual tone,—

"Jump."

Whereupon a swift, white movement toward the officer's legs was followed by, what seemed to the recipient, the locking of iron clamps about his knees. At the same instant Mr. Wadsworth darted by him, out into the hall. The man, with an oath, brought his fist against the side of Stephen's head, a heavy blow. Then a second,—and a third.

Steve winced, and buried his face yet deeper between the twisting legs. But he tightened his grip. A revolver, a long and heavy one, was snatched from a trouser's pocket, held aloft by the barrel, and brought down with savage force upon one of

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the arms that kept this much needed officer from the scuffle in the hall.

There was a cry of pain, involuntary but half suppressed, and the fingers of that hand relaxed. The broken arm hung useless from the shoulder, and the big officer wrenched himself away.

But Stephen was still in the fight. He was there for victory or for annihilation. With a forward lurch, as the man turned about, he threw his good arm about the nearest leg, below the knee, and squeezed it hard against his head and shoulder. And as he heard a cry for aid from his father's adversary, he gripped the trouser in his teeth,—for he expected another blow, and another blow might break another arm.

But his towering prisoner also heard the cry, and with desperate fury again brought down the heavy metal butt, this time regardless of results. It landed on Stephen's skull. The head drooped, all the muscles of the clinging body relaxed, and the man rushed out into the hall.

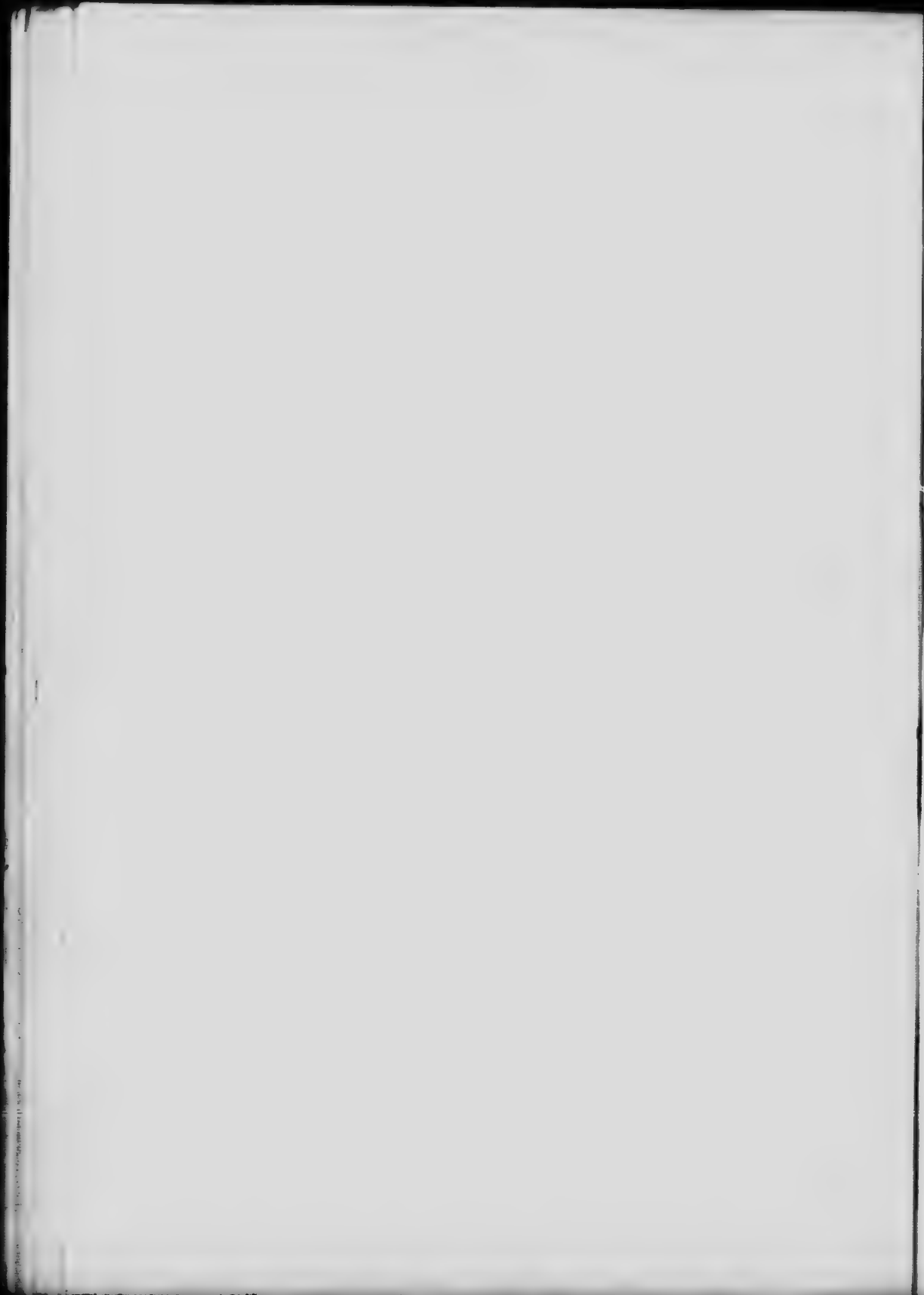
He found his comrade stretched upon the floor, bleeding and senseless. Leaning over the baluster, he heard, far down, the squeak of sliding hands along the stair rail, and the sound as of some one clearing a flight at a time, the feet only touching the steps at distant intervals.

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Straightening up and looking back into the unlighted room, he sent a curse, emphatic and comprehensive, to the silent victor now motionless upon the carpet.



"ALL THE MUSCLES OF THE CLINGING BODY RELAXED"



IV

WITH returning consciousness Steve opened his eyes. He closed them, however, in a painful effort to recall his previous existence. At present he was lying upon a bed in a spacious room, with other beds on either side of him, and all were occupied. A few persons moved silently about, mostly women in gray, with white caps and white aprons. In his struggle to remember what could have happened to bring him here without his knowledge, he started to sit up, and discovered, in so doing, that his left arm was encased in a hard, unwieldy substance, and that all his muscles were astonishingly weak.

One of the women in gray and white approached his bedside and readjusted the coverlet about his shoulders. Looking up into the face that was bending over him, he inquired, as returning memory revealed a fragment of the past,—

"Did dad get away?"

"Don't think about that now; everything is all right. Close your eyes and go to sleep again."

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"Did dad get away?" he repeated in the impatient tone of one who is not to be trifled with.

It was a hard question for a nurse who knew nothing of her patient's antecedents, and she hesitated.

"Did you want him to get away?"

"Of course I did!" and into his feverish face came a look which said plainer than words, "What sort of a fool are you, anyway?"

But she answered gently, with a soothing hand upon his shoulder,—

"Yes, he got away."

Her reward was a smile of triumphant joy, accompanied by a sidelong, somewhat boastful movement of the bandaged head, conveying the impression that some honor was due in a quarter not to be mentioned, and that he, the wreck, knew more about it than he cared to tell. But this was followed by a more serious expression, as he added, with a contraction of the eyebrows as in painful effort to unravel a mystery,—

"I don't remember the last part of it."

"There's nothing to worry about. Your arm is all nicely set, and your head will soon be as good as ever."

"My head! Was that hurt?"

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"Yes, but a few days it will be all right again."

"Oh, I don't care now;" and with a smile upon his lips, he closed his eyes in that glorified contentment known only to the victor in an up-hill fight.

It was some weeks later when he left the hospital, in surprisingly good repair considering the damage received. To his annoyance he found himself an object of sympathy, as his arm was to remain in its wrapping a few days longer, and of course he was paler; but that only intensified the honesty of his eyes, and added to the general interest.

Although glad to be well again, his return to what was formerly his home proved a melancholy joy. The familiar rooms, with their bird's-eye view over so much that had always amused him, became now a depressing reminder of his departed family. And these suddenly vanished parents had made no provision for his nourishment. In the way of money he had nothing. With his father's relatives a comfortable and a permanent home could be secured and without the asking; but sooner than accept it, he would have endured with cheerful spirit every possible tribulation of a roofless independence. Toward this paternal grandfather, who would gladly have assisted him, Stephen, since his earliest childhood, had borne a violent prejudice. And this

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prejudice extended to every member of his grandfather's household. The boy had made various visits to the homestead in Vermont before his father's career became so frankly criminal that the family were compelled to close the door against him.

This grandfather—a truthful, upright man, who respected the law and went to church on Sunday—had endeavored to conduct his family along the pathway of a reasonable virtue. But for Stephen such an atmosphere had no attraction. That he, as a boy, should be punished for theft and falsehood when the man who punished him was not the victim, was an act of officious tyranny too grotesquely virtuous for his comprehension. He remained firm in the belief that the great majority of mankind were like himself and his respected father; that theft and falsehood were the natural evidences of a higher intelligence. His sense of justice being outraged by these repeated and severe rebukes, he not only hated, but he sincerely despised, this miscomprehended and—to him—abnormal grandfather.

His mother, so far as he knew, had never possessed a relative.

During the first day of his return his hospital breakfast sustained him, and without serious discomfort; but the next morning an inward empti-

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ness cried sharply for attention. When he stepped forth into the street, his stomach had become a yearning void. His head, however, contained a brilliant scheme. He would enter the restaurant which he and his parents had often visited, tell the waiter these parents would soon be along, order a splendid breakfast, eat most of it himself, then, with an affecting display of filial anxiety, inform the proprietor of his fear for their safety and, he hoped, walk safely out. It happened, however, either by chance or from a careless providence, that just at the right moment, in front of a house along his route, a gouty gentleman with a round face and gray side-whiskers, emerged cautiously from a hansom; and, while supporting himself upon a cane, tendered a five-dollar bill to the driver. The driver shook his head, and expressed regret at his inability to change it. The gentleman, disappointed and somewhat annoyed, and while deciding upon the least troublesome course, was struck by the appearance of our hero, who happened to be passing. More truthful eyes he had never seen; and these eyes, in combination with a pale face and one arm in a sling, became saintlike in their innocence.

He stopped the boy, and as he looked down at shorter range into the cool gray orbs that met his own, he experienced a spiritual elevation; his whole

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moral nature expanding, as it were, under their ennobling influence. Gazing into these translucent depths, he felt a sense of shame at his own impurity; and when he asked the owner of these eyes if he would run across to the apothecary at the next corner and get the change for the bill, he regretted the insignificance of the sum, wishing it a hundred dollars instead of five, that he might reward such exceptional honesty by a more proportionate confidence.

"Yes, sir, of course; but the surgeon says I mustn't run or jump with this arm."

"Oh, that's all right; only walk fast, and I will see that you don't lose by it."

He turned, as the messenger departed, and moved painfully across the sidewalk. Stephen's first thought when he stepped out into the street, going diagonally across toward the apothecary's, was of the pleasure this money could afford if converted into food. His second thought, so closely allied to the first as to form a part of it, consisted merely of a quick resolve to elude the gouty gentleman and retain the bill. In reaching this decision there was no moral struggle. The good angel who whispers to the would-be sinner was not present on this occasion. That angel and this boy had never met.

Before reaching the middle of the street Steve

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had made a rapid survey of the field of action and had formed a plan. When he stepped upon the curbstone in front of the druggist's, he saw by a backward glance that the recent owner of the bill was still moving painfully across the sidewalk, and that the driver, whose back was toward him, had begun an absorbing operation upon the snapper of his whip.

With a quicker gait he turned the corner, stopped for another look, and then, being unobserved, he ran his fastest. His arm, he knew, was safe unless he fell or struck it. It was a short block, and he soon reached the other avenue, where he slowed up, partly on account of his arm, which a collision might injure, and partly from the protection afforded by the greater crowd.

For additional precaution he walked rapidly a block or two, then, with an outward smile and an inward peace, selected his restaurant. The place he chose was one of the first he came to, as the emptiness of his interior had become a positive pain. This restaurant, the width of an ordinary house, contained rows of tables on either side, their ends against the wall, each table seating four persons. At one of these tables Stephen seated himself, and gave his order. The order was unusually comprehensive, and the waiter smiled as he received it.

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"That's a big dinner, bub; sure you want to pay for all that?"

The guest took a five-dollar bill from his pocket and unfolded it in an off-hand manner.

"I guess it won't cost more'n five dollars, will it?"

"No, that's all right. But yer dead sure yer can git away with all yer've ordered?"

"Yes, and more too. And make it two portions of steak."

"Which will yer have first?"

"Bring it all at once;" and he said to himself, as the waiter departed, "It'll be bully to look at all the rest of it while I'm eating,"

When the feast was spread before him, he gazed with intoxicated senses upon the throng of dishes. No sunset sky ever poured into a painter's soul one-half the beauty that came to the yearning Stephen from the contemplation of his steak and fried potatoes; from the sausages, the omelette, the buckwheat cakes, the oysters, the stewed tomatoes, the egg-plant, and the custard-pie. He began with the custard-pie; for now that he was his own master, why not eat in the order that pleased him best?

Never before had he realized his full capacity for pleasure. Hunger and food,—a combination for the gods! And he was tasting it in its fulness.

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After the custard-pie he ate the fried oysters; and the hollowness within began to yield to a celestial calm that gladdened the remotest corners of his soul. He looked about upon the other diners, and his previous hostility soon yielded to a friendly interest.

When he entered the restaurant, there were many vacant seats, and thus far he had been alone at his little table; but as the last oysters disappeared, the two opposite chairs were occupied by fresh arrivals, a woman in black and a little girl. As the woman seated herself in front of Stephen, their glances met, and the expression of her face underwent a sudden change. She seemed surprised and even startled. He felt uneasy. Could she be the wife or sister of the man whose stolen dollars he was so thoroughly enjoying? And had she recognized him? With a frown he shifted his glance to the little girl. In her face also, as her eyes encountered his, came a similar astonishment. He read on both their faces what appeared an unwelcome recognition. But the child made no effort to conceal her surprise, and exclaimed in an audible whisper,—

“Why, mamma, his eyes are just like Mr. Folsom’s!”

“Hush, Filippa!”

But the mother’s gaze, as if by a fascination be-

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yond her control, still clung to Stephen's eyes. Her own eyes, naturally earnest and somewhat intense in their expression, showed at the present moment an unusual excitement. Leaning slightly forward, and in an obvious effort to assume a friendly manner, she said:

"Excuse me, but what is your name?"

The suspicious youth, obeying an instinct of self-preservation which had been abnormally sharpened by his own career and by his father's life and teachings, answered, with easy promptness,—

"Henry."

"And your last name?"

"Simmons."

She leaned back in her chair, disappointed. The waiter took her order. It consisted merely of one portion of soup, and bread and butter. But the daughter, whose appetite was not in harmony with such a meagre lunch, laid a hand on her mother's arm, and, looking up into her face, exclaimed in beseeching tones,—

"Oh, mamma, have more than that! Have things like those!" and she pointed with the other hand to the riotous profusion of their neighbor's dishes.

"Hush, darling. Wait until supper; then you shall have more."

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But on the mother's face came a look that told how painful the denial. The child said no more. Her eyes, however, were fixed upon the array of steaming dishes with a look that spoke plainly of an inward need. The wide, cheerful little face had frequently taken this expression since the sudden calamity which had driven her mother and herself to the strictest economies.

The little scene was not lost upon Steve, and he reflected. His reflections were broken by another question from the persistent mother, who inquired in a manner designed to avert suspicion,—

“Does your father look like you?”

But Steve's suspicions were of a character not easily allayed.

“No, ma'am, not at all.”

“What sort of a looking man is he?”

While the wary youth was hesitating, uncertain as to which manner of lie would best serve the purpose, a new arrival, just seating himself at a table behind his questioner, unconsciously supplied him with material.

“He's short and fat, with a big, red, shiny face, fat lips, and a funny nose.”

With this answer her final hope departed. She sighed, and relinquished the attack. And this answer, as far as Stephen could judge, seemed to

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soften her heart and bring a friendly feeling, for she inquired—and this time in a voice that was honestly sympathetic—if he would not like her to cut his steak, as he seemed helpless, only one of his hands being available. He thanked her, and gratefully accepted the assistance, while insisting, in his turn, upon their partaking of the dish,—an offer declined by the parent, but accepted with celerity and enthusiasm by the eager daughter. And she devoured her steak with a relish that brought a moisture to the mother's eyes. The dispenser of this joy was now experiencing that combination of benevolence and superiority so satisfying to the liberal giver. Pausing for a moment between his final sausage and the buckwheat cakes, he straightened up in his chair, and over his exuberant breakfast sent a smile to the recipient of his bounty. She returned it with interest, and expressed, by a nod, a hearty appreciation of her blessings. Of the fried potatoes she also partook, at his request, her mother having ceased to object, as in the presence of such lavish abundance there seemed little danger that the host could suffer from any reasonable diminution of his store.

Out of a little black bag—a sort of wallet—that she had previously laid upon the table, the mother hurriedly drew a heavy gold watch, but after study-

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ing it a moment, seemed to decide there was no cause for hurry, and replaced it. Steve wondered why such a handsome watch should be without a chain. There was once a chain, however, and it also was of gold, but a week before it had been exchanged, with other articles, for money to purchase food.

Filippa, who became more and more sociable under the influence of a hearty meal, exclaimed with her customary enthusiasm,—

“I had a gold ring just like yours!”

Steve nodded; but as no answer was required, he continued with his cakes.

“But mine had an inscription in it.”

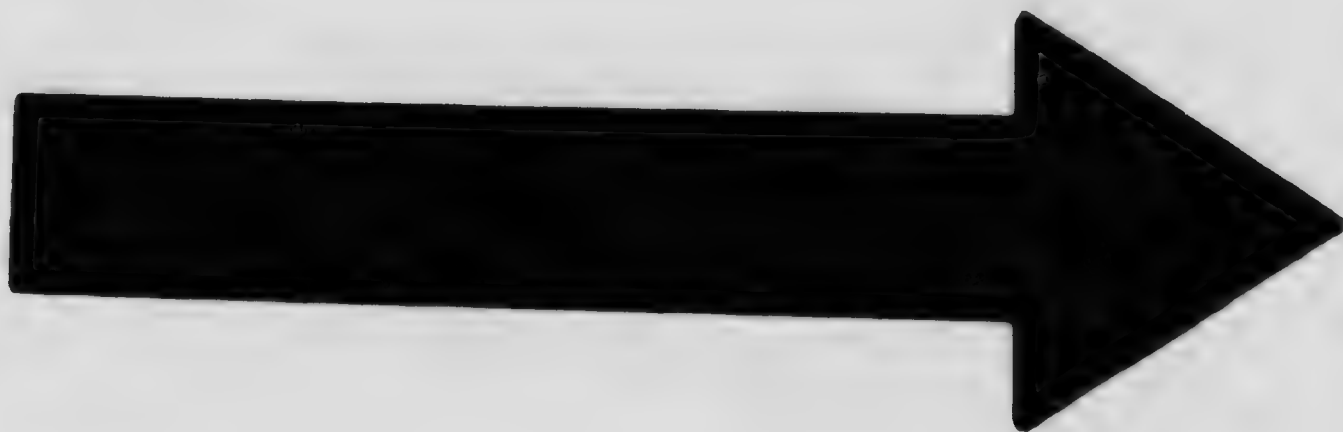
“So has mine,” he replied, bending forward as he spoke, and closing his lips over a rapturous combination of cake and syrup.

“Really? What does yours say?”

His mouth was too crowded for an immediate answer; but Filippa could not wait, and she continued,—

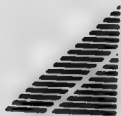
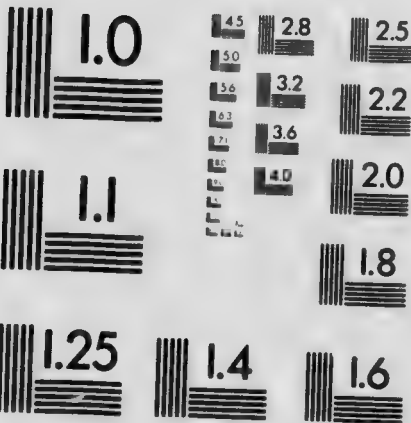
“Mine had in it, written along the inside, ‘To F. W. Z.’ Those are my initials, and stand for Filippa Whitehouse Zabarelli. And then, after that, it said, ‘God Bless the Wearer.’”

For a second the boy stopped eating and regarded her with a look of surprise. He remembered the



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inscription well, and began to wonder how his father got it.

"Yes," said Filippa; and she nodded her head, accepting his surprise as the natural tribute to a bit of exciting news.

But the wily youth knew his own father, and again drew on his armor. Turning his eyes to the mother, he found she also was watching him, but whether from a harmless interest in the conversation or from fresh doubts as to his rightful ownership of the ring he could not discover.

The girl repeated her question,—

"What does yours say?"

"Mine says, 'To Stephen,' but there is nothing after that."

"Who is Stephen?"

"Why, me of course. It was given to me."

Here the mother, in a voice that bore unmistakable evidence of a renewed distrust, said rapidly,—

"But I thought you told me your name was Henry?"

There was a pause in which the hearty eater seemed to have forgotten her presence. He poured more syrup upon his cakes.

"You told me your name was Henry," she repeated.

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"Well, a feller can have two names. I know a boy that's got four!"

"Then your name is Stephen Henry Simmons?"

"Yes."

"And they call you Henry?"

"Yes."

And he looked her straight in the face with a smile which, in combination with his eyes, was accustomed to disarm suspicion. But in this case the combination was a failure. Mrs. Zabarelli had found that eyes the counterpart of these could cover a heart too false for human safety.

And there was something in the manner of his answer that put a blight upon the good opinion she had been laboring to establish. During the remainder of the meal she said no more to him, and he was sensitive to the hostile atmosphere. Filippa, however, chattered on at intervals until she had swallowed every morsel of her steak; and when they rose to go, she thanked him, at her mother's suggestion, and emphasized her gratitude by a courtesy.

This courtesy, elaborate and un-American in character, in which perhaps she had been drilled by her uncle, Signor Guglielmo Onofredo Travaggini Biffi Titinnio Zabarelli, was partially lost upon the recipient, who sat low in his chair and whose own

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head came not far above his breakfast. Filippa's face, which was about on a level with the table when she stood erect, disappeared entirely from his vision in the execution of the movement. For an instant he thought she had sat upon the floor; but as her friendly smile came up again to view, he divined the motive of the ceremony and nodded his acknowledgment. Her mother also thanked him politely, but obviously from a sense of duty.

They had gone but a moment when Steve detected, beneath a corner of a napkin, the wallet that contained the watch. His eyes brightened, and his heart beat faster with a fresh excitement.

Here was a find! The five dollars he now possessed was as nothing to it! What lots of dollars such a watch would bring! Through his head came a swift procession of the joys within his grasp. And he must hurry up and get away before she should miss it and return.

But, along with this procession, came the memory of Filippa, her hunger and her cheerful little face. He recalled the niggardly lunch she would have eaten if he, the rescuer, had not been present. Steve frowned and bit his lip at the thought of inviting a girl to breakfast, securing her friendship, receiving her thanks and courtesies, and then "swiping" the family watch.

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No! not that! He had no ambition to be good, but—there were limits.

Quickly he snatched the bag, and acting upon an impulse of which he was secretly ashamed and in whose duration he had little confidence, he ran out of the restaurant, overtook his new acquaintances on the sidewalk, and returned the property. Filippa greeted him with a cordial smile, while her mother, with a sudden pallor, pressed a hand to her heart, as she realized how narrow was her escape from an irretrievable loss. Her expressions of gratitude were effusive, and she was ashamed of the wrong she had done him. But he waited not for thanks, and hurried back to his unfinished meal.

While mortified at having yielded to a foolish impulse, his shame was tempered by the knowledge that several of his favorite heroes, men prominent in highway robbery, in piracy, and in promiscuous crime, had more than once, where women and children were involved, been equally weak. And there was another consolation: his father would never know it.

On leaving the restaurant he experienced a satisfying solidity in welcome contrast to his recent emptiness. He felt more important. He was less suspicious, and he took pride and pleasure in a brazen indifference as to whether the former owner

Dr Thorne's Idea

of the bill might discover him or not. And Nature had been so thorough in Steve's physical outfit that he suffered no discomfort from the profusion and complexity of his feast.

But later in the afternoon he encountered signs of trouble against which his digestion and his stolen money were of no avail. A sheriff, with an auctioneer, was making a list of the various objects that comprised his home; and before they departed the janitor showed the apartment to a couple of women who, as prospective tenants, found it exactly what they needed.

Occupying his favorite perch, the parlor window-seat, while the various invaders were moving about from one chamber to another, he leaned out and looked with mournful eyes over the far-reaching city, with its glittering river on either side, its unceasing hum, its countless chimneys, its flags, its towers, and its purple distance; all familiar, and all so closely associated with his vanished parents that unmanly tears obscured his vision, and he drew a grimy knuckle across his eyes. It seemed now another city, less his own and not so friendly. A city that could swallow up two parents in a single night was a thing to be mistrusted.

And far below him he looked down upon a group of children dancing about an organ-grinder. Faintly

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he could hear the music, a plaintive little tune, which so intensified his loneliness that his knuckles were insufficient, and he was compelled to draw a sleeve across his cheek.

On the following day more people inspected the apartment, and the preparations for an auction were continued. That this home was no longer his he realized with a saddened spirit, but from those about him he took every precaution to conceal his feelings.

A woman who occupied a lower apartment of the building offered to adopt him, for the present at least; and another acquaintance of his father, a man with no children, made a similar offer. The janitor's wife suggested an institution for orphans.

But Steve had plans of his own. The thought of being adopted by a respectable family and brought up in a respectable way was in violation of every instinct of his being. He had read several books, and his course of reading, in which he had not been bothered by his parents, consisted almost exclusively of stories of adventure, of the lives and deeds of famous pugilists, pirates, train-robbers, burglars, and highwaymen; and now, fired by their example, and unhampered by parental authority, he would leave school behind him and be a man at once. Like many sons, he had made a more careful

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study of his father than that person had suspected. His knowledge of what Mr. Wadsworth alluded to as his "business" was of course somewhat undefined, but for his father's character and methods, so far as he could know them, his admiration was unbounded. From association with this parent and from a natural bent, Steve had developed some clear ideas upon humanity, and upon the world at large. Without defining this philosophy himself he classified mankind into two divisions,—

Those who possessed wit and courage.

Those who were honest.

That the latter should be the prey of their more interesting brethren was a conclusion requiring no argument. For the honest ones, the "suckers,"—he enjoyed an amiable but distinct contempt, and he had no intention of serving in their ranks. The police, of course, were the natural enemies of progress.

In accordance with these beliefs he outlined his own career, and decided upon immediate action. As a preliminary detail he communed with Davey Knox. Davey's tastes and moral outfit bore a dull resemblance to his own, and they decided to see the world together. While Davey was by no means Steve's conception of a hero, he was the only boy available. Steve knew him to be a liar

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and a thief, both of which were needed in the life before them; he also knew him to be a coward, and for this he despised him. But in enterprises where virtue is a hindrance, one must not be too punctilious as to associates.

V

THE glory of a perfect day descended as with a special blessing upon a church at Lynstock. This sanctuary, not a hundred miles from New York, held the centre of a faultless lawn, and was of simple but satisfying architecture. The material was of hammered stone. Occupying the choicest site in the choicest of New England villages, it sheltered this August Sunday,—as on other Sundays,—the choicest people.

Other sanctuaries, resorts of promiscuous outsiders, were scattered along the village, all of wood, old-fashioned and painted white, with massive columns of a heathen pattern; but those who by especial purity had achieved a closer friendship with the Lord were ensconced in this Episcopal temple. Not only were the worshippers themselves of finer clay, but all their belongings gave token of a similar excellence. Even the row of carriages beneath the shadowing elms across the way bore outward evidence of the loftiest aims. In fact, a

Dr Thorne's Idea

comparison of these blameless equipages with the cheaper vehicles about the other shrines offered convincing testimony as to which religion was the safest guide.

Within this temple the atmosphere was yet more decorous. All stained glass, all mural decorations and other fittings were, like the members of the congregation, expensively quiet and in perfect taste. And the congregation, while comporting itself with the impressiveness of a piety above reproach, gave evidence of that satisfying holiness born only of solid opulence and correct attire. Concerning the celestial prospects of those present, there was, if one could judge by appearances, no cause for alarm.

The painted heads of the twelve apostles above the pulpit bore a troubled air, as if abashed by an unmerited patronage. They suspected perhaps, this dozen common men, the irony of their present elevation. They may have compared it with their probable reception had they presented themselves in the flesh at the mansions of the cautious worshippers in the pews below. The episcopacy of these worshippers was the result of inheritance and environment. Another and a different religion, if indorsed by the proper persons, would have been adopted with the same complacency and maintained with the same decision.

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Upon this occasion there were, as usual, fewer men than women. Nearly every pew was occupied, for the clergyman was a preacher of distinction. He was a man about fifty years of age, large of frame, with a massive head and somewhat heavy features. In his hair, carelessly arranged and obviously with little heed from its owner, were shades of gray. His skin, partly from exposure, was brown and rather dark; his eyes were also brown, and with their heavy lids and straight eyebrows high above, gave an impression of repose and strength. A certain awkwardness of figure was intensified by the shortness of his neck and by a roundness about the shoulders.

He had been speaking in a general way of the duties of life and of the obligations of wealth, and he expressed himself with a clearness and decision that drove languor from the eyelids of every Cræsus in the church. If there previously existed, in the minds of the present congregation, any doubt or mystery as to why the average millionaire, although envied for his wealth, was not an object of affection among the poor, he now removed it. His language was not ambiguous. His voice, rich, full, and finely modulated, held the attention of every person in the building.

And the building had seldom been so crowded.

Dr Thorne's Idea

For Dr. Thorne was not only a preacher of singular eloquence, but his life and character had given him an exceptional position. Although a native of the town, and the personal friend of many in the congregation, he seldom occupied this pulpit. His own pastorate, one of the richest and most influential in New York, he had resigned the previous winter, in the belief that he could be of greater usefulness in other and quite different fields.

But this calling to account of millionaires was incidental. It served, however, even if its effects were temporary, to arouse the attention and disturb the peace of certain members of the congregation. For Dr. Thorne knew his fellow-men, and he knew too well that threats of future brimstone or guarantee of heavenly recompense would never startle Midas.

As the sermon proceeded, it became evident, from the silence throughout the church and from the vigilance of his listeners, that something of more than ordinary interest was before them. The older men were surprised, and followed him with straining ears to be sure they heard aright. The younger men received his words in a similar spirit, but with faces reflecting the earnestness and, at times, the enthusiasm of the speaker. But every woman, old or young, took in his words with eager interest and with brightening eyes. And this surprise and in-

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terest were augmented by the knowledge that Dr. Thorne was not a person of careless impulse or unconsidered speech, but a man of large experience and of sober judgment.

The remarks which were causing this unwonted consideration related to the advent of our Saviour. After asserting, not as a theological deduction but as an authenticated fact, that Christ had appeared upon the earth at various epochs since the Crucifixion, he went on to explain why such appearances were in perfect harmony with His life and precepts, and, if thoughtfully considered, need cause no surprise. All who believed in the immortality of the soul believed that Christ, though crucified, would ever remain a living entity. And if this be true, he argued, it certainly is not in accordance with our conception of His character that during these centuries of human doubt and human suffering He, whose mission it was to console and guide, should remain an indifferent observer.

"His life and teachings," he continued, "were not those of one who holds himself aloof, in frigid state, ignoring the prayers, the hopes, the lives and deaths of countless millions of his followers. Moreover, if sent among us by a benevolent Creator upon so stupendous a duty as the redemption of mankind, such a duty, if begun in earnest, would never be

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abandoned after one brief experiment, and at a time when three-quarters of the earth was yet unpeopled. Were the future millions yet unborn to rely, during twenty centuries at least, upon translations from an unspoken language, for a word from their Redeemer?"

He continued in calm but impressive tones: "If Christ's spoken words, if His personality or His living presence, are needful to those wavering in their allegiance, if a sign will save them,—is that sign to be withheld? If we may believe His own words, He considered faith of first importance. If we honestly believe in His previous coming, why doubt the coming of to-day?"

Thus far the listeners throughout the church had followed him with attentive interest. This interest became keener and more alert when Dr. Thorne, with the calm conviction of one who knows whereof he speaks, declared that Christ had revisited this earth not once, but many times,—in our own day, and here, in our own land,—not in spirit only, but bodily, as a fellow-man; that He had cheered the despairing, encouraged the weak, and given life and hope to those whose burdens were greater than their strength.

And there swept through the congregation a fresh emotion, as they received the statement that the

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speaker himself, if at liberty to do so, could produce a witness, a personal friend of many now before him, who had been this very year in the presence of our Lord. Moreover, this Presence was no illusion, nor the dream of a man in sickness who mistook for realities the products of his own imagination. He had felt the touch of a soothing hand, and received words from living lips that turned the current of his life.

This announcement was received in solemn silence. Not the rustle of a gown or the movement of a fan disturbed the stillness of the church. But, as Dr. Thorne knew well, there were many who would deny his testimony and deride his faith. Among these was a gentleman of sixty or thereabouts, with blooming face and serene expression, whose speculative eyes and whose whiskers, snowy but alert, gave hints of what he was,—a person of importance. Leisurely he turned his head and looked across the aisle. Meeting the glance of another financial triumph, not unlike himself in expression, in raiment, and in years, he slowly raised his eyebrows,—the fraction of an inch,—and in so doing conveyed distinctly, as in words, his opinion of the parson.

But Dr. Thorne, in that respect, was under no illusion. He was not making this effort with any

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hope of penetrating the heart of capital. Too well he knew and understood the impregnable golden armor of certain members in this congregation. There were others, however, who by recent affliction, by trials beyond their force, or by a hopeless sorrow, had come nearer the portals of that other world; and to these, by look, by meaning, and by brotherly compassion, he spoke, and not in vain.

The sermon, calmly and impressively delivered, proceeded to the end, and notwithstanding its purport brought conviction to certain of its hearers. For to these there was evidence of something more than theory coming thus from one of large experience, whose truth and honor were above reproach.

After the service certain friends and acquaintances remained,—some to congratulate him upon his sermon, others to ask a question or to express their regret at the rarity of his visits. Most of them were women, representing various degrees of enthusiasm or of religious fervor, or of curiosity and friendly interest; but all, even those who fluttered and gushed with a graceful excitement, were self-possessed and faultless in attire. One or two were patronizing, not with intent, but from force of habit.

Dr. Thorne received this shower of words with outward gratitude and with his usual composure.

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This composure bore a faint resemblance to that patience with which a Saint Bernard allows kittens to scramble over his back. They may tickle or annoy, but he takes them for what they are. As to inquiries concerning the subject of his sermon, he turned them aside politely, but with decision, replying, in answer to the most frequent question, that the person referred to wished no publicity.

There was another gentleman present who also received attention, and from its quality he appeared a person of distinction. Moreover, he bore himself as one accustomed to receive this sort of tribute. While more impressive in his manner than Dr. Thorne, it was evident, nevertheless, that these attentions caused him far more pleasure than annoyance. But this pleasure was suitably repressed, and even stately. No human being would have presumed upon it.

He was a bishop, not only by terrestrial appointment, but, obviously, by design of his Creator. He had the manner and expression, the mouth and voice, the bearing, the head and legs, and the cheerful gravity of a bishop. No attribute was wanting. He was of suitable height, erect, bald-headed, well nourished, and impressive. His features were regular, and his honesty unquestioned. He was intellectual, considerate, and always gracious.

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Bishop Thorne, although at present on his summer visit from his diocese in a neighboring State, was a native of Lynstock and cousin of the doctor. They had played together as boys, and knew each other well.

When the last lingerer had departed, leaving these two alone, standing together near the pulpit, the bishop congratulated his cousin upon the effect his eloquence had produced.

"That's a splendid sermon, Will, and it makes one regret more than ever your desertion of the pulpit."

"It was a false position."

"So you have said before, but you are too punctilious. Your point of view is from too dizzy an altitude. Give your conscience a vacation and forget the creed. Our duty is to the greatest number, not to ourselves."

Dr. Thorne turned his eyes with a sidelong look toward the bishop, and asked,

"So you think it becoming in a follower of Christ to occupy a pulpit whose creed he outwardly accepts and inwardly denies?"

The bishop turned partly away, and studied the heads of the apostles.

"Your case is exceptional."

"But my life, nevertheless, would be a living lie."

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"It would be a most charitable lie and of infinite value."

Dr. Thorne regarded his companion with a friendly frown.

"Since when have you become a follower of Ignatius?"

"Not at all, but our endeavor should be for the greatest good of the greatest number." Here the bishop looked about and lowered his voice. "If all of us who denied the creed should desert the church, where would our followers be?"

"Where they ought to be,—among the followers of a simpler faith."

They moved toward the door, and the bishop reiterated his argument.

"No," he said. "You are the victim of an abnormal conscience. Your arguments fail to justify your course. Such eloquence as yours should not be wasted. It was not given you to be buried. If you take our Saviour as your model—and I know you do—you should remember that in giving His life to mankind He was influenced by no details of creed."

Dr. Thorne stopped and confronted his cousin.

"Do you think," he answered, slightly raising his chin, and regarding the bishop with a lowering of the heavy eyelids which failed, however, to cover

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a gleam of irony beneath—"do you think that if our Saviour were alive to-day He would give His time and energy to a select and fashionable congregation of high-church Episcopalians?"

Thoughtfully the bishop lowered his head, then answered,—

"No."

Along the village street they walked, Dr. Thorne with a lunging gait, his head bent forward and the heavy shoulders swinging as if ploughing through a crowd. The bishop, dignified, erect, immaculate, and evangelical, avoided instinctively all inequalities of the path, and stubbed his toes against no obstacles in the way.

At the gate before a large, old-fashioned residence they parted, Dr. Thorne continuing on his way, out into the open country beyond the village.

The road took a wandering course between fields and pastures, with patches of wood at intervals, where the shade, on a day like this, gave a welcome refuge. Heavily but rapidly the pedestrian trudged along, and the town was soon a mile behind him. To his right were straggling woods and rocky pastures with the Berkshire hills beyond.

But on his left the fields and smoother pastures

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sloped gently to a wooded valley, where the eye could follow, along the tree-tops, the meanderings of a water-course. Across this valley, up the long sweep of open country, there came to-day a refreshing breeze.

Our traveller halted by the way to gather clover blossoms; and it was evident, by the dexterity with which he bound them by a blade of grass, that his huge fingers were no strangers to the task.

His thoughts, as he gave the finishing touches to this simple offering, went backward nearly thirty years to a period in which a woman was the central figure of his life,—a slender woman, light-haired and frail, with laughing lips, who loved this fragrance; and who, as they walked together, would stop, and, standing still with eyes half closed, inhale the clover-laden air and repeat for the hundredth time, "How I love it!"

And he, when returning from a walk, always presented her with specimens of this plant.

Their married life was short, six years or less; and now, with the clover to his lips, the cool breeze against his cheeks, he lived again the vanished years.

With a deep breath he looked up at the sky, then over at the distant hills, and, turning back into the road, he renewed his march.

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Farther on, where a wood path joined the highway, lay a curious little graveyard of the type familiar to New England. Raised above the road by a wall that served as a terrace, it was partly hidden by a row of hemlocks. Toward the entrance, along the wood path, the doctor turned mechanically, as one familiar with the way. Ascending some granite steps, rough hewn and forced asunder by a century of frosts, where weeds and wild-flowers in rank luxuriance filled the gaping joints, he paused a moment in the shadow of two weather-beaten hemlocks that stood, like forgotten sentinels, on a thankless duty. He pushed his hat from his brow, and the soft breeze from the valley beat gently against his face as he regarded, with friendly interest, two scolding squirrels in the branches above who appeared annoyed at this intrusion.

The quaint, uncared-for little cemetery covered less than an acre. Youthful pines and birches sprouted here and there among the graves; birds sang and fluttered in the sunlight, perching upon the mossy headstones as if no saddening thoughts held precedence in that garden. Toward the centre, winding among the graves and headstones, ran a narrow path. The feet that made this path were Dr. Thorne's.

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Again he trod it to its termination beside a grave, not unlike the others, but whose headstone was less ancient than its neighbors. Here, a broken-hearted man, he had laid his wife, more than twenty years ago.

Slowly, and with his usual clumsiness, he lowered his bulky form and knelt beside the mound. Two yellow butterflies, resplendent in the summer sun, reeled carelessly away as he removed a bunch of withered clover from the grave and replaced it with the fresher one of to-day. With some precision he arranged his offering, and then, with downcast face and dreaming eyes recalled distinctly as if yesterday—for these memories, from frequent invitation, came willingly, as familiar friends—the last time he saw her face and heard her voice. He had alighted from the buggy at the little station at Lynstock, and as he reached forward for his valise, she laid her hand on his and whispered, with tearful eyes, but with a smile half jesting, half sad, "When you open this bag to-night, I shall be inside."

And when, at a distant city, he unfolded a certain garment for the night, he found in a button-hole of the bosom a bunch of clover. As he stood smiling, the welcome messengers to his lips, there came a knock at the door and he received the tele-

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gram which told him the hands that plucked the flowers were forever still.

These scenes, and others similar, he had lived so many times that his wife, beside whose grave he knelt, had ever remained not only an unfading memory, but a living influence. Recollections which once had crushed him with an unbearable regret had now become a pleasure,—a saddening pleasure, perhaps, but soothing; and a pleasure of which he never tired.

From this journey into the past he was suddenly recalled by a voice, sharp and imperious, close beside him.

“Throw up your hands!”

Startled, and still upon his knees, he turned partially around, and confronted, within a yard of his face, the muzzle of a revolver. Behind this weapon, at arm's length, stood a boy whose appearance presented so much that was contradictory that the kneeling victim, in the novelty of the situation, forgot his danger. The robber, not a dozen years of age, stood firmly upon his straddling legs, with obvious intent to convey a terrifying impression of ruthlessness and ferocity.

But there was something in his face, particularly about the eyes, so uniquely honest and so out of harmony with the belt of cartridges, the rakish hat

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with its upturned brim, and the pitiless contraction of the eyebrows, that Dr. Thorne forgot to raise his arms. Instead, he gazed calmly into the virtuous eyes that from behind the pistol as calmly met his own.

"Throw up your hands!" came again from the boyish lips and in a boyish voice; and Dr. Thorne, with a touch of alarm, observed that the revolver was cocked, with a bullet in every chamber. But instead of throwing up his hands, he climbed slowly to his feet, and, as he did so, he noticed another boy in the background, off nearer the entrance to the enclosure. This second boy, as their eyes met, edged back toward the steps in a manner that left no doubt as to the suddenness of his disappearance in case of danger. As the preacher glanced down again at the more courageous desperado who stood defiantly before him, he acted swiftly upon a strategic idea as it came into his head. Looking off toward the retreating comrade, he said,—

"Your friend is deserting you."

As the boy instinctively turned his head to verify the evil tidings, Dr. Thorne, with one step forward, knocked the pistol from his hand. The blow discharged it, and the sharp report seemed a profanation of the silent acre. He heard, within a foot of his ear, the whistle of the bullet. Before

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the boy could recover himself he was seized by the arm and shoulder.

"So it was really loaded, you rascal!" and he gave the figure in his grasp a violent shake. He was surprised, in the boy's struggle to free himself, at the strength and energy of his youthful captive. But no struggling could avail in such a grip, and the would-be robber after one or two efforts stood quiet—but unresigned.

"Don't you know better than to handle loaded weapons in that way? It's a wonder you didn't kill me."

There was no reply.

"Do you want to be hanged for murder?"

After a moment's reflection, as if the question required a cautious answer, the boy replied, with enough bravado to show the enemy he was still unterrified,—

"No, sir, not right off."

The doctor turned him about, and looked down into his face. As he met the cool, gray, truthful eyes, he felt convinced that he was the victim of a childish folly.

Off in the highway, as fast as his legs could take him, he noticed the reserve guard travelling feverishly to the westward. He could not resist a smile.

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"Your friend knows where he is safe, and he means to get there. You would better follow his example if you ever have the chance."

The prisoner also looked in that direction, then muttered with a measureless contempt: "Ho! Davey always was a coward! He oughter been a girl!"

The doctor for an instant thought of resenting this slur upon the other sex, but instead, he offered terms to the enemy.

"If I let you go will you promise to behave better, and not play with loaded pistols in the future?"

"Yes, I promise."

"You give me your word of honor?"

"Yes, sir."

As he released his grip and took a backward step, the boy sprang toward the pistol, snatched it from the grass, cocked it, and levelled it again toward the figure before him.

"Now, who's ahead?" he exclaimed. "This time you throw up your hands, or I'll fire it!"

But the hands were not thrown up. The massive head drooped slowly forward, and two calm, brown eyes rested mournfully upon the speaker. Reproachfully and without anger he looked into the triumphant face.

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"So your promise goes for nothing! You should have been a sneak thief or a pick-pocket; not an open robber. I have always understood that famous robbers had some self-respect, some regard for their word of honor."

Over the villain's face came a flush of color. Shame and indignation took the place of triumph, and the eyes wavered. There was an inward struggle, as easily read by the man before him as from an open book. Lowering the revolver, he turned it about, holding the muzzle toward himself, then stepped forward and presented it to his towering victor. In an uneven voice, and with a strong effort to repress the quivering of a lip, he mumbled hurriedly,—

"I'm not a sneak thief! Take it yourself! I don't want it!"

Dr. Thorne took the weapon, carefully pointed it in another direction as he lowered the hammer, then returned it to the owner, saying,—

"As we both are men of honor, it doesn't matter who keeps the pistol."

Five minutes later they were sitting in the shade of the two hemlocks, each upon one of the low granite blocks at the entrance of the cemetery. Here it was cooler, and Dr. Thorne laid his hat beside him, and drew his handkerchief across his

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brow; for there had been a certain excitement in the recent episode, and the heat, out there in the sun, was penetrating. As the boy sat opposite, his feet just clearing the ground, the cleryman suspected, from the soiled collar and wristbands, the long red stockings worn through at the knees, and the shoes which appeared first to have received a soaking, then to have travelled many miles over a dusty road, that his *vis-à-vis* had found that wealth and luxury were not infallible accompaniments to a robber's life.

"Do your parents live in Lynstock?"

"No, sir. I don't know where that is."

"Why, this is Lynstock. You are in it now."

The boy nodded carelessly, accepting the statement, but taking no interest in the village or in its name.

"Where do they live, your parents?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know where your parents live?"

"No, sir. They both cleared out, and I don't know where." His eyes rested calmly upon the questioner, yet with a certain watchfulness.

"What is your name?"

The youth hesitated, but decided this time to tell the truth.

"Stephen Wadsworth."

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"And your home? When did you come from home?"

"I came from New York, me and Davey together, but the home was rented to somebody else."

As he spoke, he broke off a stem of milkweed, and appeared surprised at the white liquid within, and at its stickiness. His friend noticed it.

"You have not lived in the country much."

"No, sir."

"Where did you sleep last night?"

"In the porch of a house, off there;" and he pointed over the valley to the west of the village.

"And the night before that we slept in a swell stable. Climbed through the winder, and had bully beds on the carriage cushions. We hooked a ride on a freight train to that place; and if the brakeman hadn't spotted us, we'd have gone a lot further."

"Your friend is still going farther, and in a hurry."

"Oh, he's no use! He went back on me yesterday, and he would again. I shan't go after *him* much. He's wanted to back out and go home ever since we started. Now he can do it. He ain't no use—he *is* no use."

This correction of faulty grammar led the

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preacher to believe that the stranger had quitted a more refined and educated home than was indicated by his present calling.

"Perhaps your father is a professional man."

"I guess he is."

"A clergyman."

"Not much!" was retorted emphatically, as one resents an injustice. "He's an all-around sport."

"What does he do?"

"I don't know exactly. I never saw him do it."

The questioner inferred from the manner of this reply that it was intentionally ambiguous.

"Tell me why you boys selected Lynstou for a visit."

"Oh, just the same as the other places,—to hold folks up, and so forth."

"Then you are a professional robber?"

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Thorne's face expressed neither surprise nor disapproval. His glance wandered calmly away among the gravestones, as if professional robbers were his daily associates, the companions of his choice. When he looked again into the eyes which by their exceeding goodness persistently gave the lie to the noxious sentiments of their owner, he smiled pleasantly, and said,—

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"When you have had more experience in this particular field of crime, you will select your victims with sounder judgment. The idea of waylaying a preacher on his way from church! They never have money. You might as well 'hold up' one of the oxen in the pasture."

"You've got a watch."

"True. But you would not rob a peaceable, hard-working minister of his only treasure."

The highwayman for an instant showed a slight embarrassment, but, quickly recovering himself, he answered with studied indifference, as he tossed a pebble down the granite steps:

"Of course I would! Business is business."

Dr. Thorne was too experienced to risk a moral discourse at this stage of an acquaintance. After a moment's silence he asked:

"Have you been to breakfast?"

"Yes, sir, back in that other town."

"Was it a good one?"

The traveller kicked his heels indifferently against the granite block, and inserted a spear of grass between his lips before he answered:

"Good enough."

"Do you mind telling me what you had?"

"Some apples."

"Apples! They must have been green ones."

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"Sort of."

The doctor took out his watch.

"My dinner is all ready and waiting for me. Won't you come and share it? I should like very much to have you."

As he spoke, he felt the gaze of the robber fixed intently upon him as if suspecting treachery.

"I guess not. I must be goin'."

"Where are you going?"

"Off there," pointing to the east. "To the wild west, where the fun is;" and he slid from his seat and stood up.

The clergyman also arose and put on his hat.

"I will make a bargain with you. If you come home with me and spend the night, I will have your shirt washed and give you a new pair of stockings."

The boy looked suspiciously into his face, then lowered his eyes and bestowed careful attention to a hole he was digging in the turf with the toe of his boot. During the pause one of the squirrels in the branches above uttered a final protest, then retired to the inner apartments of his home.

"Well, what do you say?"

The traveller seemed embarrassed. With a side-long look he asked,—

"Where do you come in?"

"I shall have the pleasure of doing my share to—

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ward establishing a pleasant friendship. It seems to me that a solid friendship after so unpromising an introduction is a thing to celebrate."

The highwayman returned the smile with which this was spoken, but his doubts were not allayed.

"You will hold on to me and not let me go."

"I give you my word of honor you shall leave whenever you wish. I am telling you the truth. I like you and wish to know you better. Of course, as a clergyman, I cannot indorse the profession you have chosen, but I like your spirit; and—as far as I can judge—I like your character. Come. Let us go home and celebrate;" and he held out his hand.

Stephen looked up for a second into the heavy, benevolent face, then stepped forward and laid his grimy hand upon the extended palm.

"All right."

Five big, fat fingers closed about it with a hearty grasp, the grasp of that unwavering friendship that loves us for our virtues and forgives our faults.

VI

ACROSS the fields, a shorter cut than by the highway, Dr. Thorne returned to the village, gleaning, as he went, bits of personal history from his new acquaintance; and the more he learned of his antecedents, the less he marvelled at results.

As they emerged upon the main avenue from a neighbor's yard, Steve was awed by the prevailing silence. To this New Yorker who had rarely escaped from the noise and bustle of his native city, the wide, empty street with its overhanging trees, and the houses, cheerful and prosperous but with no outward signs of human life, all gave the impression of a deserted settlement; of something mortuary and forgotten.

Stopping before a low old-fashioned gate, painted white, like the fence on either side, Dr Thorne held it open for his guest to enter. Stephen found himself on a gravel walk, at the other end of which, some twenty yards away, stood a long, low house, also white but nearly covered with vines.

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Along the borders of this walk were strips of box, nearly up to his waist; dark, impenetrable and fragrant. And behind these little hedges, in wild, disorderly profusion, flashed a sea of flowers, of all the colors in the universe, now dazzling beneath the summer sun. They were very tall, some higher than his head. Hollyhocks and roses, pink peonies and lark-spur, sweet peas, nasturtiums, foxglove and poppies, smiled—or rather laughed—all huddled together, an orgy of blinding color.

Bees buzzed, some drunk and others sober; while casual humming-birds, in the abandonment of frivolity, reeled gleefully from flower to flower.

Steve blinked, and instinctively took a long, deep breath of an intoxicant the like of which had never figured in his dreams; for no such odors could have survived a journey to the Wadsworth flat. Rich, overladen with perfumes,—mignonette in the ascendant,—it stole into his brain and seemed to lift him up. To be sure, he was bad, too bad for honest boys to play with, but his imagination was young and active, and this flood that poured into his soul, a flood of gentleness and delight,—what was it?

Could this be fairy-land?

Every sense seemed tingling into a new existence. With a touch he could have floated to the

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clouds. He forgot his body and his legs, his pistol, his empty stomach, and the joys of crime.

But this transformation was only temporary. With his host by his side he trod the gravel walk toward the house, and when half-way there, from among the flowers close beside the path, arose the head and shoulders of a radiant woman. Her hair was golden, and the sunshine seemed to form a halo round about it. She wore a dress of white, and in her hands were pinks. Steve halted again.

This must be the fairy of the garden!

So light and dainty was this figure, among the many colors, that had Stephen been a man he would have strode in and plucked her with the other flowers. To him it was a novel type, the delicate, sensitive face with the large brown eyes, at once cheerful and sad, and the mouth ever ready to smile, yet with signs of trouble about the corners.

"Why, papa! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You are awfully late for dinner!"

And as she stepped out upon the walk through an opening in the box, she saw the boy and nodded a smiling welcome.

"This is a guest I have brought to visit you, Bessie; a friend of mine who will dine with us."

She said pleasant things with a pleasant smile,

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and made him feel at home; and as she adjusted a pink in the buttonhole of his jacket, Stephen experienced yet another sensation, more novel and overpowering than the other.

He fell in love.

It was sudden, but no passion was ever more complete; that is, of course, no love of boy for a woman twice his age. He was eleven and she was twenty-six, but to every boy this is liable to occur; and with Stephen it was an overwhelming sensation. He drank her in with bashful eyes. Her gentle face and voice and manner were to him a revelation. And he saw, without defining it, an expression about her eyes and mouth that suggested sorrow, with a brave resolve to appear more cheerful than she felt.

The only woman with whom Stephen thus far had been on terms of intimacy was his mother, and between the two there was little resemblance. This lady's hair was a quieter yellow; not selected by herself, but fully as effective: there was no paint upon her cheeks, nor artificial emphasis about the eyes. Her raiment also was less conspicuous. His mother, taller and more majestic, could easily have vanquished this person in a struggle, but by this he did not allow himself to be prejudiced. He realized, instinctively, that the virtues of his innamorata

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were virtues of another nature, and to be judged from a different standpoint.

She led him upstairs to an orderly chamber,—unlike his own,—supervised the washing of his face and hands, and scolded him with an affectionate smile for having his hair too short to brush. It was a fighting cut, and showed every contour of his head. And during all he was dumb, like a fool, giving the briefest answers to her friendly questions. He felt a pleasant thrill whenever her fingers touched him, and yearned for an opportunity to show her what he really was,—to rescue her from some frightful danger. If a hundred redskins would only pounce into the room to scalp and kill her, that he, with her trembling form in his arms, might lay them low in quick succession, he would have been supremely happy. To win her admiration was his chief desire. But at present he saw no prospect of achieving it. These times of peace, for men of action, were far from satisfying.

This house of Dr. Thorne's was built in the preceding century by an ancestor of Revolutionary fame. The dining-room, long and narrow, with all its windows at the end, had, like the rest of the house, a low ceiling. When Stephen entered, under Bessie's guidance, the outer blinds were closed, and the light at first seemed dim and insufficient; but

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he saw Dr. Thorne at one end of the table, back to the windows. At the other end sat an elderly woman, stout and in a light dress. She took his hand and held it in her own for a moment, while she said, in a low but decided voice, rapidly and with a pleasant smile,—

"So you are Mr. Wadsworth. Well, you are a good boy; I can see that. And you look as if the wind wouldn't blow you over. Gracious! what truthful eyes! Why, it's better than going to Sunday-school just to look into them. Sit down there, in that place—next to Dr. Thorne, and eat a good dinner."

Stephen looked into her own eyes as she spoke, and saw they were small, black, and very sharp. The flesh at the corners was drawn up in little wrinkles in such a manner as to render it uncertain whether she was simply smiling or perusing your own thoughts. Her face seemed pale, but not with the pallor of disease, for Aunt Lorinda, now in her seventy-sixth year, had always enjoyed the very best of health, and thus far there were no indications of a change. She appeared about fifty. As to bodily vigor and mental energy, she was still in her youth.

Stephen sat in the chair indicated, and, being bountifully helped by his host, proceeded to manifest

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his appreciation of the food with the celerity and disregard of consequences peculiar to shipwrecked mariners and to growing boys. There was conversation while he ate; but he took little interest, only speaking when questioned. And the answers were brief.

While waiting for the dessert, he noticed a vacant chair opposite his own, and he wondered who was to sit in it. He also took long breaths of the perfumes wafted through the house from the old garden in front.

Glad he was that he had come. He looked furtively once or twice at the heavenly being beside him, and his love grew stronger with each glance. Perhaps these people would let him remain here always. He would do heroic things, and she would be sure to like him!

Aunt Lorinda he also watched, and with increasing interest. Her manner was that of a very young person,—not affected, but wide-awake and amusing. In conversation she seemed courageous and emphatic, and there was never a doubt of her meaning. Her remarks must have been funny, for both Dr. Thorne and Bessie often laughed at what she said. Although a little afraid of her at first, he soon began to like her.

After helping to the dessert—the richest and most

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satisfying blueberry-pudding the guest had ever tasted—she leaned back and said,—

“That was a splendid sermon this morning, William. It made an impression, but of course there are many who can't believe it.”

“Of course,” said Dr. Thorne. “I expect that. It is a hard thing to believe—without preparation.”

“And while I can't quite believe it myself,” said Aunt Lorinda, “it irritates me to have others doubt it. This morning in the vestibule, coming out, Peter Upham was just behind me, and—”

“Peter Upham?” inquired Bessie, “that horrid Peter Upham,—Jennie's father, with the funny eyes?”

“Yes, and the eyes are still his. Two little oysters, each with a green pea in the middle. And a mouth like a bullfrog's—only bigger and looser. His voice, when he lowers it, is like a storm at sea. You know his kind of piety,—that damns all who differ. I am sure he patronizes the Almighty when they are alone together. Well, this morning, coming out, he was just behind me. I heard him say in his lowest voice,—a voice that shook the windows and bent the elms beyond the Common: ‘A most eloquent sermon, but although of a religious nature myself, I am constrained to say that somebody has been stuffing Dr. Thorne.’ Well, at first I thought

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of jamming my parasol into his mouth and opening it, but it's a new parasol. He saw me just as he finished, and began a rigmarole of pompous explanations."

Dr. Thorne looked troubled and shook his head.

"Peter is sensitive, and I hope you didn't make it unpleasant for him."

Aunt Lorinda, with more wrinkles about her eyes, replied,—

"No, not particularly. I only told him he was not the first Peter who had gone back on the Lord."

Dr. Thorne frowned sadly as upon a wayward child with whom argument is wasted.

A few moments later a step was heard in the hall, and Bessie rose from the table, saying:

"There's Alfred."

Then Stephen heard her speaking to the newcomer as together they ascended the stairs.

"Good!" said Aunt Lorinda. "Now, dear little Alfred can have his boots taken off, and be dressed for dinner."

"Is Alfred a little boy?" Steve inquired.

"Yes, and always will be;" but Dr. Thorne gave her a warning look. "No, that was partly in joke. Alfred is Captain Chauncey, Mrs. Chauncey's husband."

"Mrs. Chauncey?"

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"Yes, she just left. We call her Bessie."

So Bessie was married! Steve shrunk beneath the blow. For a moment his appetite forsook him. But then, to lovers under twelve, such announcements are less destructive than at maturer periods. To be near her for the present, with liberty to adore, was sufficient to feed the fires of his unexacting love. Although the shock was cruel, he quickly recovered, and with no abatement of devotion.

"Is Captain Chauncey a real soldier?" he inquired.

"Bless you, no!" exclaimed Aunt Lorinda. "He gave that up when he was married, and became a professional husband. He superintends his wife. He's a successful invalid now. You don't know what it is to be that kind of an invalid?"

Steve shook his head. She screwed up her eyes and looked sharply at him from the corners.

"I should say that he had the same line of diseases that you have."

"But I am *never* sick!"

"That's his trouble, and it unfits him for work."

Steve did not quite understand; but it mattered little, as Aunt Lorinda was conversing for her own delectation. Dr. Thorne threw a warning glance which she carefully avoided.

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"Think how awful it is for an able-bodied man in the prime of life to realize that consumption, fits, fatigue, old age, or some other fatal disease may strike him at any moment! And yet he fights bravely on. He is a fisherman. He has been fishing this morning,—Sunday."

"Does he go on the ocean?" asked Steve.

"Oh, dear no! He is not that foolish sort of a fisherman. No wet feet and empty stomachs for him! He sits on the bank and bobs a line. But he never catches anything. That would be cruel, wouldn't it?—and laborious."

"Be careful, Aunt Lorinda;" and Dr. Thorne turned the lady's conversation into other fields.

Although the finer shades of Aunt Lorinda's contempt were lost upon Stephen, he guessed that she had a poor opinion of Bessie's husband. It was some hours later that he first met this gentleman.

Coming down to supper, he found Dr. Thorne, Aunt Lorinda, and Bessie beneath the vine-covered porch. Upon the seat beside Bessie, his legs crossed and his hands in his pockets, sat the successful invalid; and Steve was pleased with his appearance. Captain Chauncey's age was mysterious, but he gave the impression—as was his intent—of a man of thirty-five or forty. But Aunt Lorinda and Dr. Thorne knew him to be twenty-four years older than

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his wife, and his wife was twenty-six. His youthful mustache, from which the few gray hairs had been carefully extracted, turned pleasantly upwards at the extremities. In his face were no lines of care. The nose, chin, and forehead made an excellent profile. His eyeglasses seemed of more importance than the eyes behind, which were neither large, small, light, dark, attractive, nor repellent. These glasses necessitated a slight but perpetual elevation of the chin when regarding others.

Upon closer acquaintance it was usually discovered that Captain Chauncey's mouth was peculiar. The under lip projected slightly, with no curve beneath; that is, his profile from mouth to chin was a straight, uncompromising line. The mouth, as a whole, while suggesting certain uncomfortable varieties of decision, was less disquieting in repose than when its owner smiled. For when Captain Chauncey smiled, and with enjoyment, it was either from triumph or from contempt. The mouth seemed to open at the corners on these occasions, yet with no display of hilarity.

But he had a good figure, was always well dressed, and, when necessary, polite and even entertaining.

"Alfred, this is Mr. Stephen Wadsworth," said Bessie. "He has come to make us a visit."

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With mock ceremoniousness Captain Chauncey shook his hand.

"I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Wadsworth. You are from New York, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you a student of phrenology, Mr. Wadsworth?"

"No, sir."

"That's lucky, for if you were, the contour of your own skull might cause you some uneasiness."

"Why, Alfred," said Bessie, "what do you mean? Stephen has quite a handsome head."

"Yes, very likely," replied Captain Chauncey, passing his hand over Stephen's close-cropped hair, "but it depends altogether on the point of view. Gladiatorially it is a perfect head. Phrenologically, a man with a head like that is either a thief or a murderer. Just run your eye over the portraits of distinguished criminals and you will find they are endowed with similar craniums."

He patted Stephen on the shoulder, as he said in what was intended for a playful manner,—

"You don't mind my uttering these harmless prophecies, Stephen?"

"No, sir, I don't mind."

Dr. Thorne, remembering his own narrow escape in the cemetery, looked sharply at the boy; but he

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saw that Captain Chauncey's remarks were taken simply as a joke.

"You shouldn't talk that way, even in fun," said Bessie.

"Well," said her husband, sinking back into his former position, "we will play it's a joke."

The person whose good opinion was more precious than all others upon earth was, of course, the woman he loved; and when Stephen found her eyes fixed amiably upon him, he became indifferent to all extraneous comment.

"You must certainly take a thorough course in phrenology," said Aunt Lorinda. "Don't neglect a faculty that enables you not only to decide offhand on the character of every one you meet, but to foretell their future. Experience is nothing to it."

Captain Chauncey ignored this remark. Five years ago, on his last visit to America, he had ventured, in the presence of others, a few sarcastic remarks with intent to ridicule Aunt Lorinda. At that period he knew her but slightly, and had hoped by one crushing, almost insulting speech, reflecting upon her age, her dependent position, and her want of tact, to silence her forever, at least as regarded himself. But Aunt Lorinda in her sweetest manner had retorted with a calmness and skill that had stretched her adversary upon the field of battle. In

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her response, courteously worded, she had informed him—and the others present—that a scheming, impecunious, middle-aged man, who married an inexperienced girl for her money and wrecked her happiness by his own brutality and selfishness, was not entitled to the respect of decent people.

Never since that day had he crossed swords with Aunt Lorinda. And that interview had been, with him, a sufficient excuse for depriving Bessie of all intercourse with her family. He preferred Vienna to New York, and this present trip to Lynstock was the first time in five years that he had allowed his wife to revisit her home. Now, a man of leisure, having resigned from the army soon after his marriage, he devoted his intellect and energy to the nursing of a perfect constitution. And for this career the earth could not have furnished a more useful consort than Bessie Thorne. Affectionate, self-sacrificing, and abnormally conscientious, she became a willing slave. Her sense of duty and allegiance to the man she had married prevented the admission, even to herself, that her idol was of the poorest clay, and that all dreams of happiness were forever gone. Her husband, not being a fool, was aware that Dr. Thorne despised him. Of Aunt Lorinda's contempt there had never been concealment.

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That his wife, who knew him best of all, could, with her lofty ideals, respect his character, was too incredible even for Captain Chauncey's vanity; and this knowledge in itself was an irritation. Of this irritation, his wife, being ever present, was the most convenient victim. Although she made no confession of matrimonial sorrows, these two friends knew better than herself why she had grown ten years older in half that number of years, and why the gayety and love of fun which seemed a part of her nature had all departed.

VII

AS the days went by, it was discovered with surprise and pain that certain traits of character possessed by the new arrival were at variance with the moral standard of the Thornes. Truth and Stephen, it appeared, took little pleasure in each other's company. He looked down upon this clear-eyed goddess as a feeble substitute for intelligence. Of course there are times when Truth is harmless and the easiest thing, and at these times she and Stephen worked together; but in matters of business her co-operation was unsought.

And what brought despair to the members of this honest household was the freedom from shame with which Stephen, when detected in a lie, looked them pleasantly in the eyes, as if falsehood were the natural course; he being convinced, all protestations to the contrary, that theirs would be a similar course under similar conditions. And a yet sadder blow for these upright people, whose strength and purity of character were models for all who knew them,

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was the gradual realization that this member of their household held independent views upon the rights of ownership. In acquiring the property of others without their knowledge he displayed a facility and courage that both dazzled and appalled his friends. And this accomplishment, instead of injuring his reputation with certain of his pals, proved a source of popularity, as all bananas, dates, or other luxuries obtained from the store without the formality of payment he always shared freely with his comrades. If rebuked at home, it became obvious, from his amiable but shameless arguments, that, although outwardly convinced, he recognized no sin in appropriating what others did not require.

These propensities, rare in Lynstock, and practically unknown beneath the roof-tree of the Thornes, created hostile comment in the village and embarrassment among his friends. But Dr. Thorne, when reformatory institutions were suggested by the neighbors, still clung to Stephen. He always insisted upon a further trial. In fact personal friends of the offender, as a rule, were inclined to leniency. This was easily explained by the possession on Stephen's part of certain qualities that even his victims could not help respecting. His fidelity to his friends, his manliness, his self-reliance,

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and extraordinary courage; his cheerfulness, his love of fair play and unhesitating sacrifice of self when occasion required, had won him adherents who remained wilfully blind to his lack of truth and to his contempt for certain brands of honor. To honor of a special kind, however, he was always true. If he gave his word when the breaking of it might compromise a friend, he invariably fulfilled his promise at whatever cost.

Another characteristic that brought annoyance and mortification to the household, and especially to the peace-loving Bessie, was this boy's pugnacity. Hardly a day went by, during the first fortnight of his visit, in which his face presented its normal coloring. Either an eye was blackened, a lip swollen, or there were other disfigurements. His knuckles, as a rule, were "skinned." For it appeared necessary, at least to Stephen, that decisions should be reached at once as to whether he could "lick" the other boys, or *vice versa*. This, to his shame be it recorded, was owing less to curiosity on his part than to a desire for displaying a certain physical superiority. And while this superiority led to needless encounters of his own seeking, it must also be recorded, to his credit, that he never shrunk from confronting other warriors of whatever size. These bigger pugilists, however, found little satisfaction in

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meeting an enemy who not only enjoyed the combat, but who slept upon the field of battle. Steve never acknowledged defeat. He was always ready to begin again. The result was that, after a few sanguinary encounters with the fighting boys of the village, he was awarded the championship for the sake of peace: and hostilities ended.

While achieving this glory, he proved a most distressing element among the peaceable, order-loving Thornes. Almost everything he did was a surprise. Of this he had no suspicion, believing himself, without giving the matter any thought, to be the average boy. But to Bessie and Aunt Lorinda he was a revelation. That any single human being should comprise so many conflicting traits, so many that were alarming,—even criminal,—and yet display upon occasion qualities that bordered on the heroic, was even more than a revelation. It was a shock. And it broadened their points of view with a suddenness that destroyed their faith in all previous theories of human nature.

One rainy afternoon during a children's party at a neighbor's house Aunt Lorinda discovered, in the ever surprising Stephen, a somewhat unexpected trait. One of the youthful guests, an awkward, plainly dressed girl, Hannah Snell by name, a victim of the ostracism that children—like their elders—

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often inflict upon the undeserving, was ostentatiously ignored. Aunt Lorinda saw Stephen approach this isolated being, escort her into the game of which he was one of the leaders, and exert himself in a boyish way to mitigate the curse. Moreover, when that particular game was finished and the girl once more ignored, he again approached the derelict and sat beside her. And Aunt Lorinda was amused to see Stephen induce another boy—by what art or coercion she could only guess—also attach himself.

Walking home together Aunt Lorinda asked Stephen how he enjoyed the party.

"Oh, first rate! But I don't know as girls help much. I like boys better."

"I was glad to see you so kind to Hannah Snell. She is a nice girl, isn't she?"

"No."

Aunt Lorinda looked down in surprise.

"Why, I thought you seemed to like her. You were certainly very polite, and I was glad to see it."

"Oh, I did that just for—just because the others didn't treat her right. 'Twasn't the square thing. It made me kind of mad and I said to myself, 'I'll pretend she's my best girl and I'll lick every feller that lets her alone.'"

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"Oh, not that!"

"Yes, siree! But I found I'd have to lick all the boys there and I couldn't do that. That is, not all at once."

Aunt Lorinda smiled. Looking down upon the stalwart champion at her side she patted his shoulder.

"Well, Stephen, the motive was good; and very much to your credit."

An hour later, after narrating the incident to Dr. Thorne, she added, "The only trouble with Stephen is that he doesn't fit his epoch. As a medieval baron, a Viking, or an early conqueror he would have been a shining light and made a name in history. And do you know, William—don't whisper it outside—but I am afraid I prefer a bad boy like Stephen to some very superior men we know."

"But, Aunt Lorinda, I don't admit that Stephen is bad. He acts according to his conscience."

"His conscience," said Aunt Lorinda, "is the conscience of a Corsair. Perhaps that is why other boys, in comparison, seem too tame and civilized."

The acceptance in their midst of such a dog as Cato proved the liberalizing tendencies of Stephen's influence. Cato's introduction took place one afternoon as Aunt Lorinda with Dr. Thorne and the bishop were strolling along the path through the

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old-fashioned garden, conversing with solemn faces upon a family matter.

They all looked up as the little gate swung to, and saw Stephen, his face illumined with pride and joy, running toward them with an animal in tow. Halting before the trio, he exclaimed,—

“Look at him! He's mine!”

And he pointed triumphantly to the quadruped by his side.

This creature was a bulldog, brindled, wide-chested, bow-legged, with a projecting jaw and visible teeth. In the absurdly short space between his nose and his dissipated, bloodshot eyes were cynical creases, as if a careless or a disappointed Creator had jammed his nose into his face. This nose and the stumps of his close-cut ears were an unpleasant pink. The same color obtained also about his eyes. He looked immoral, pugnacious, and tough. He seemed a dog who might prefer gin to water, and who might swear and chew tobacco; who if he smoked would hold the cigar in a corner of his mouth, and never remove it. His tongue hung out a little between his teeth, and when he fixed his eyes upon a person he gave the impression as if about to spring and fasten onto human flesh until Death, and Death alone, should part his jaws.

Aunt Lorinda took a backward step, rather be-

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hind the bishop; and the bishop, had not pride restrained him, would have placed himself in turn behind Aunt Lorinda. But he stood his ground, and encountered without flinching the upward gaze of the brindled brute, who looked him calmly and somewhat warningly in the eyes with an expression that made it clear indeed that he had no fear of bishops.

"Take him away! Take him away!" exclaimed Aunt Lorinda. "Take that horrid thing out of this yard, Stephen, and never bring him here again!"

The joy departed from Stephen's face. In a tone of the keenest disappointment he exclaimed,—

"Why, he's a splendid dog! He can lick anything in town."

"Where did you get him, Stephen?" asked Dr. Thorne.

"From Barney Case."

"Did you buy him?"

"No, sir; he gave him to me."

"That is unusual. Barney is not in the habit of giving away his dogs. Are you sure he gave him to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it will be no loss to you if you take him back."

A swift glance from Steve expressed more to

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Dr. Thorne than to the others, and the boy lowered his eyes.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Aunt Lorinda. "Think of living with such a thing! Why, I should feel safer with a Bengal tiger."

"He won't bite," said Steve. "Look!" and stooping down he pried open the shapeless mouth and inserted a finger. During this performance the animal turned his large brown eyes in gentle inquiry to Stephen's face. These eyes, upon a calmer examination, seemed honest and even tender; out of harmony, in fact, with the reckless pugnacity of his general appearance.

Dr. Thorne, better versed in dogs than his companions, turned to Aunt Lorinda and said,—

"He probably is not so bad as he looks."

"To be that bad," said the bishop, "would be impossible."

"What is his name, Stephen?"

"Cato."

"Cato? There seems a want of fitness." Then, turning to the bishop with a serious face, he inquired,—

"John, do you remember Cato as that kind of man,—a bow-legged, Bowery tough, with a chip on his shoulder?"

The bishop smiled.

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"No, I do not; but there may be more fitness than we think. Those later Romans were a dangerous lot."

However, it ended by Aunt Lorinda being persuaded to give Cato a chance, and that chance was all he needed. Both she and Bessie, when once accustomed to his threatening appearance, found him not only safe, but faithful, affectionate, and long-suffering. They always maintained, however, that a dog of Cato's aspect rendered outward respectability impossible.

"Strangers who see him at the door," said Aunt Lorinda, "will be sure there's a bar-room in the house."

The following afternoon Dr. Thorne called Steve into the library. He told him, as the boy stood leaning against his knee, a hand in one of his own, that he had learned from Barney Case that seven dollars had been received for Cato.

"Now, Steve, I want you to tell me, truthfully, where you got that money."

Steve hesitated. Then looking his questioner frankly in the face, his own eyes radiant with truth,—

"I found it."

"Where did you find it?"

Again there was hesitation.

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"I forget."

Dr. Thorne with his other hand patted him gently on the shoulder.

"No, no; be honest, Stephen. Where did you find it?"

"On the kitchen table."

"And you knew it was Ellen's money."

"I didn't know."

"Yes, you knew, for you heard poor Ellen asking about it."

Steve twisted the little gold ring upon his finger, but answered nothing.

"I thought you and Ellen were the best of friends."

"We be—we *are*."

"She has been very kind to you, hasn't she? She has cooked things especially for you; and she tied up your thumb that day you cut it."

"Yes."

"And now," continued the doctor, always gently, "you repay her by robbing her of her wages."

Steve lowered his eyes.

"You rob her, your own friend, to whom you ought to be grateful, by depriving her of the benefits of her labor."

This was putting it in a new light. A little color crept over Stephen's face, and he looked away.

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"Pretty small business, isn't it, for a manly boy with any sense of honor? And it is disappointing for me to find you are too weak to resist temptation, and ready to turn at any moment and betray those who trust you, who helped you when in trouble. Ingratitude is bad enough; but to be a thieving traitor who—"

"No, no!" exclaimed Steve, facing about with quivering lips, "I ain't that! I ain't! I didn't think all that. Really, I didn't!" and, extending his arm, he pressed his hand against the doctor's chest.

"Well, I believe you, Stephen; that you didn't realize what a mean business you were undertaking. But I want you to make me a promise,—a solemn promise that you will stick to through thick and thin, all your life. That is, that you will never steal again; never, under any circumstances. Can you make such a promise and keep it?"

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!"

"But I do not wish you to make the promise unless you are *sure* you can keep it."

"I am sure I can. I *will*."

"Very well. Then lay your hand in mine, so. Now say, 'Dr. Thorne, I give you my word of honor that I will *never* steal again.'"

Steve repeated the words with an emphasis and decision that gave encouragement to the listener.

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The interview had been short; but the counsellor and friend, considering the offender's character, believed the lesson might be weakened by a moral lecture.

Ellen was reimbursed, and Stephen made to feel that he was freely forgiven and fully trusted.

A day or two later, quite early in the morning, as Steve was lounging about the porch in company with Cato, his rapturous admirer, Captain Chauncey came down the stairs and halted in the doorway, rod in hand, all dressed and equipped for fishing. His face seemed harder than usual, and yet about his mouth were indications of a smile. This smile, had it developed, would have been sardonic and exultant.

"Are you going fishing?" asked Stephen.

Captain Chauncey regarded the boy a moment, and appeared to be getting his mouth into just the right position for the kind of answer he proposed to give. This resulted in a curling of the upper lip, a slight opening of the mouth, and a further projection of the under jaw.

"No, I am going first to a funeral and then to church. I should think you might have guessed it from my basket, rod, and bait box."

Stephen, too simple and direct himself to fully grasp the sarcasm, smiled pleasantly in return.

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Captain Chauncey gave no responding smile, but asked a question,—

“Would the murderer like to go too?”

“Yes!” and Steve, with enthusiasm, jumped quickly from his seat. “I’ll get my line in a second!”

“Hold on! Don’t be in a hurry. To-day I prefer to be alone. The invitation is for some other day.”

Then, as the face before him changed from happy expectancy to the keenest sorrow, and then to embarrassment, the captain really smiled,—his usual smile, however, of victory, not of mirth: his mouth opening wider at the corners than in the centre. He also raised his chin, and regarded Stephen with eyes that gave no suggestion of a smile. Then he turned and walked away.

Stephen’s adoration of Mrs. Chauncey implied no hostility toward the existing husband. On the contrary, he tried to like him. Future complications resulting from a second spouse caused him no anxiety.

Whether Captain Chauncey would relinquish his wife upon the appearance of another suitor, or whether God in His mercy would remove the captain at the proper time, as He habitually removed the shades of night at sunrise, were unimportant details

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to be adjusted in the happy future. Steve only knew with certainty that ten years hence, when he was twenty-one,—Bessie of course remaining her present age,—they were to be married; he, Stephen, in the intervening years having covered himself with blood and glory. At present he was forced to content himself with watching her, with listening to her voice, and dreaming dreams of heroic deeds and complete possession.

It was with deep although silent grief that he learned the lady of his choice was merely visiting at Lynstock; and he partook sincerely in the family sorrow when Bessie informed them, one morning at breakfast, that their visit was to be shortened by a month, Captain Chauncey having decided to return to Vienna within a week. There were traces of weeping in her face when she came to the table, and this information was given with quivering lips and in a breaking voice.

Aunt Lorinda laid down her knife and fork, leaned back in her chair, and refrained from speech. She knew that if she spoke her expressions would shock her nephew. Had the captain himself been present, the temptation might have proved too strong. Dr. Thorne arose from the table and walked into his study, bearing the outward traces of a righteous indignation; for he knew as well as

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Aunt Lorinda that Captain Chauncey made no pretence of respect for Bessie's wishes or for those of her family. This visit to her home, the first in five years, was not likely to be repeated, as the captain was bored at Lynstock, and he was not a victim to the habit of self-sacrifice. To be sure, he had promised, and it was distinctly understood, that they were to remain until the middle of September; and he knew that for this violation of his word there would be an augmentation of contempt on the part of Aunt Lorinda and of Dr. Thorne. That troubled him little, however, as once out of Lynstock neither he nor Bessie should ever enter it again.

As for Stephen, he looked forward to a sunless life after the departure of the woman he loved.

The knowledge of this approaching separation caused father and daughter to be more frequently together during the remaining days. And one afternoon that very week, while Dr. Thorne was writing at his study-table, Bessie sat near the open window, her work in her lap, gazing sadly over the flowers to the distant hills. A summer breeze, bearing perfumes from the old-fashioned garden,—the garden of her happy youth,—blew gently against her face, and sharpened the sorrow of approaching separation.

Around this library—a long low room, with win-

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dows on opposite sides—ran an old-fashioned wainscoting reaching half-way to the ceiling. The paper was a faded green, dotted with enormous roses, once crimson, but which during seventy years had faded to the palest pink. There were cases filled with books, and above them hung family portraits and some quaint old prints. An enormous chimney, with panels to the ceiling and cupboards at the sides, filled one end of the apartment.

Stephen, in a further corner, was adorning the surface of a kite. This kite, a pretentious structure, was the result of long hours of labor. The only sounds in the room came from the squeaking goose-quill moving swiftly across the paper, with occasional movements from Stephen as he applied the colors to the "Daisy Flyer." Steve was no artist, and once, when the writer turned to see how the work progressed, he smiled at the gaudy masses that represented, in the painter's mind, a lady with golden wings. One indigo eye, from the excess of color, had traversed cheek and neck. The space for the mouth had been forgotten, and the yellow wings were fluttering in unwished-for places. Cato, slumbrous and with blinking eyes, sat close by his master's feet. Occasionally he moved an admiring glance from the kite to Stephen's face.

This peaceful silence, whose only interruption

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within half an hour had been the temporary visit of a humming-bird, at last was harshly broken. In the vicinity of the kite there was a rapid movement, with a peculiar sound from Cato as if he had received a kick; a snapping of wood, a rending of paper, all followed by a flow of language that brought the writer to his feet with an exclamation of disgust.

This flow of language consisted almost exclusively of curses. The kite with the lady on its surface was denounced in reckless terms. The Almighty and our Saviour were blasphemously insulted, these holy names, in the lavish and unconsidered invective, becoming themselves the objects of their own anathema. And from the startling frequency of the word "damn" and from its superfluous repetition, it was obvious that the speaker employed it not only for the meaning conveyed, but because of its welcome sound. The malodorousness of the most sacred characters of Christianity was repeatedly alluded to, and with no attempt at refinement.

With the first sentence of this triumph of blasphemy Bessie started to her feet, horror-stricken and doubting her own senses. The revolting language, all swiftly uttered in a reckless fury, had for its accompaniment a whirlwind of paper, sticks, and

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kite tail, Stephen dancing in the centre with revolving arms, beside himself with passion.

Cato, from beneath a distant table, looked on in pained astonishment, and fixed inquiring eyes upon Dr. Thorne.

The commotion ended as suddenly as it began. Stephen staggered from the wreck, drawing the back of his hand across his forehead. His face was very white. Defiantly and with sullen rage his eyes for an instant met the gaze of Dr. Thorne; then he lowered his face as if in shame.

"Are you mad?"

There was no answer.

"Are you mad? Do you suppose such language is permitted in this house? Or in any other?"

Stephen looked up. His lips, now dry and colorless, made the motions of replying, but no sound came forth.

"You understand?" said Dr. Thorne, with a severity in terrifying contrast to his usual gentleness. "Even to have such thoughts is disgraceful. To utter them an unpardonable offence—not only against religion but against decency and against your friends."

Stephen tried to speak, and had to moisten his lips. His voice was hoarse, and came with difficulty.

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"What did I say?"

"What did you say! Do you suppose any self-respecting person is going to repeat it?"

In a firmer voice, unmistakably sincere, and with a troubled expression, he said: "Really, sir; really I don't know what I said."

"Then are you crazy? Are you a blasphemer so callous and irresponsible that you have already forgotten?"

The blasphemer closed his eyes, and again drew the back of a hand across his forehead.

"I guess I'm crazy, like ma."

"Better if you *were* crazy than do it knowingly."

Steve made no defence.

"What's that about your mother? You say crazy like *her*?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was she—had she such fits of temper?"

"Oh, yes, sir! And she was crazy mad when she had 'em." Then, with a mournful glance toward the remnants of the kite,—the kite upon which he and Billy Brewster had spent several afternoons of enthusiastic labor, "She used to smash things too. She came near killin' dad, an' more'n once."

In a gentler voice, reflectively, as if communing with himself, Dr. Thorne inquired, "So your mother had similar attacks?"

Dr Thorne's Idea

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Thorne returned to his chair, and for a moment sat in silence. Then he called Stephen to his side, and as he listened to certain anecdotes of Mrs. Wadsworth, of her murderous fury, and of how father and son, habitually and by a previous understanding, seized and held her for common safety until reason returned, his anger gave place to pity. And Steve, thoroughly ashamed of his behavior, received words of consolation and advice. Then, collecting the scattered fragments of the kite, he left the library, the forgiving Cato at his heels.

Dr. Thorne went over to the window, and standing by his daughter, they discussed this matter, deciding to aid their guest by gentle means toward a mastery of himself.

"Such a temper," said the father, "is an awful heritage, too heavy for human resistance. Poor Steve! I sometimes think him specially ordained, by inheritance and training, for a life of crime. His very virtues are against him. Courage, self-reliance, and a love of freedom and adventure make a dangerous balance-wheel to a perverted conscience. And with his health and strength it is all the harder to be good."

As he stood by her chair, both looking out into the garden, they went on to other subjects, each

Dr Thorne's Idea

avoiding the one that lay heaviest in their hearts, the parting, perhaps forever, that was soon to come.

Long after he had returned to his work, Bessie's hands lay idle in her lap, her eyes moving sadly from the old garden to the little cemetery on the hill, then to her parent at the table, whose life, as she now reviewed it, seemed one unvarying record of kindly deeds, of unresting charity, and of self-forgetfulness.

The sun, now sinking in the west, was creeping slowly across the carpet, when a door from the hall opened very slowly—and very little. Dr. Thorne, who chanced in a reflective moment to be looking in that direction, saw the maid, with a warning glance toward Bessie, anxiously beckon him to come out. He obeyed.

On the porch stood a group of men. At the end of the path, outside the gate, were other people, men, women, and children, all silent and with solemn faces, looking earnestly toward the house. The spokesman, as Dr. Thorne approached, removed his hat and stood aside. Upon a rudely constructed litter lay a human form, the face reverently hidden by a cloth.

"He was found in the woods about an hour ago at the foot of Beeman's Ledge, by a couple o' boys.

Dr Thorne's Idea

He probably slipped from the rocks, and must 'a' fell nigh onto a hundred feet."

As he spoke, the cloth was removed, and Dr. Thorne looked down upon the cold, white face of Captain Chauncey.

VIII

RELATING to this death were circumstances which invited explanation.

The narrowest part of the ledge—the point where Captain Chauncey's hat was found and at whose base lay the body—was fully two yards wide, and although a hundred feet from the rocks beneath was never regarded as a hazardous path. By the inhabitants of Upper Lynstock it was frequently travelled as a shorter cut to the larger village. Captain Chauncey himself had trodden it twenty times at least this very summer in going to Willow Pond, and on this particular day there appeared no signs of unusual peril. It was not slippery, and no portion of the shelf had given way.

His felt hat, a light pearl-gray in color, was lying a yard or more from the edge of the precipice, and bore unmistakable marks of having been ground into the earth by a heel with iron nails. This suggested violence, as he could hardly have done it himself in an accidental fall. Nothing else was found upon the

Dr Thorne's Idea

ledge. His fishing-rod with nickel-plated joints, which he carried when he left the house, had disappeared. The most thorough search in the neighborhood of his body and also about the ledge developed no trace of it.

The body lay directly beneath the ledge. The back of the skull was broken in, presumably by the fall, as no signs of blood were visible either upon his hat or anywhere in its vicinity. His cravat, the clothing about his chest, and one sleeve were begrimed and scraped with dirt, the rest of his apparel being hardly soiled. The finger-nails of both hands, being broken and filled with dirt, gave evidence of desperate clutchings at earth and rocks and bushes.

These facts excited comment, and comment led swiftly to suspicion,—first of suicide, then of foul play. The evidence, however, while seemingly sufficient for either theory, contradicted both.

No theory of suicide was accepted by those who knew him. He was fond of life, and his fear of death was more than wholesome. The idea of murder appeared equally unreasonable, as he had no enemies in the village, and his pockets were undisturbed. His watch and a few dollars still remained upon his person. Nobody in Lynstock seemed likely to commit a murder for a fishing-rod, especially as its discovery might send the possessor to the gallows.

Dr Thorne's Idea

Taken altogether, it was a death that formed a thrilling mystery.

On the day of the funeral, from early morning until late at night, a heavy rain, varying only in its degrees of copiousness, saturated the village and formed generous puddles along its streets and sidewalks.

The services were at the house, Dr. Thorne officiating.

A prayer was offered by the bishop. This prayer, considering the bishop's low esteem for the spirit previously animating the remains before him, was a non-committal triumph. While cautious, it appeared benignly comprehensive. In so far as it concerned the deceased, this prayer could have been offered with equal fitness at the funeral of Florence Nightingale or of Captain Kidd.

The task of Dr. Thorne was far less simple. A more specific application is expected in a eulogy, and Captain Chauncey had earned his sincere contempt, a contempt that was hearty and without reservation. Moreover the death which it was now his office to publicly regret, could not fail to prove a blessing to his daughter and an unspeakable relief to all who loved her. But the speaker was no novice. With skilful emphasis he touched upon those faults of which the deceased was guiltless, dwelling kindly

Dr Thorne's Idea

upon the fact that in this sudden death they had lost a refined, intelligent companion, a seeker after knowledge, a temperate, dignified, law-abiding citizen. And this he could do with truth, wishing his hearers to forget, at least for the time, that this same son-in-law had been ungrateful, mean, and cruel; that he was a domestic bully, useless, offensively selfish, and impossible to live with. In these remarks he thought principally of his mourning daughter. This daughter, whose sensitive conscience upbraided her for having withheld that perfect love and confidence which the ideal wife should lavish upon a husband, was crushed with grief; and this grief was now more torturing than if her husband had been a better man.

Aunt Lorinda, her face invisible behind a veil, seemed a model of self-control; while Steve, in his Sunday suit of black with a broad white collar, sat demurely near the foot of the coffin and comported himself with becoming solemnity. Once, however, as Dr. Thorne, during a pause in his remarks, happened to look down into his face, he was greeted by an intent, somewhat puzzled expression, quickly followed by a half-suppressed smile, which at the moment he regarded merely as a boyish recognition.

On returning from the cemetery the disconsolate Bessie sought seclusion in her chamber, Aunt

Dr Thorne's Idea

Lorinda, with Dr. Thorne and the Bishop, passing on into the library.

As they entered this room, where the melancholy silence of a recent death still held possession, the irrepressible aunt was the first to speak.

"Death is an awful thing, although this bereavement does strengthen my faith in the watchfulness of Providence."

"Aunt Lorinda!" exclaimed Dr. Thorne. "Respect the dead!"

"Oh, come now, William," she retorted, turning about and confronting her two distinguished nephews, "you are much too good! You know as well as anybody that he was the curse of Bessie's life. And of yours too! Any show of grief from those who care for that girl is a transparent sham. We've put on black and seen him properly buried,—all with solemn faces and a decent show of grief,—which is more than he would have done for us. And now, I say, all who have any regard for our Bessie are inwardly rejoicing."

Turning suddenly to the bishop, she demanded,—

"Am I right, John, or not?"

The bishop raised his eyebrows and stroked his handsome chin.

"Well," he answered reflectively. "Possibly,—in a sense. But there is a solemnity in death—"

Dr Thorne's Idea

"Solemnity in rubbish! You parsons are more timid than mice. Forget that you are a bishop and for once in your life give an honest opinion!"

Dr. Thorne could not repress a smile.

"That's into you, John."

"You both know," continued Aunt Lorinda, untying the strings of her bonnet with decisive fingers, "that this sudden taking off was no accident. It was the punishment of God!"

A movement in a farther corner of the room caused all to look in that direction. From a spacious chair whose back was toward them, Stephen emerged and came slowly toward the group. In his hand was a book, and at his heels walked Cato. He had never appeared so intensely respectable—so genteel and outwardly moral—as now. In his Sunday suit of black, which he had donned for the funeral, with its knee-breeches, long stockings, and expansive linen collar, he suggested a Van Dyck portrait as he stood, book in hand, against the gloom behind, the side-light from the windows leaving half his face in shadow.

With a nod of approval he smiled upon Aunt Lorinda. "It wasn't any accident, 'cause I did it."

Dr. Thorne frowned.

"Did what?"

"Pushed Captain Chauncey off the ledge."

Dr Thorne's Idea

Aunt Lorinda took a backward step and sank into the nearest chair. Her parted lips lost what little color they possessed.

"*You pushed him off!*" she exclaimed, in a voice hardly above a whisper.

Steve nodded,—a boastful, swaggering nod; and he smiled as if enjoying her surprise.

Although she knew the boy to be a liar, there was something in his face and manner at the present moment that deprived her of the power of speech. Dr. Thorne with contracted brows regarded him intently, as if refusing to believe. He also knew him to be a liar, but he had learned to recognize those occasions when Truth and Stephen were together, and this was one of them.

"What do you mean, Stephen?" he asked in a constrained voice, in a tone more anxious than severe. "You do not mean to say that you—*killed* Captain Chauncey?"

"Yes, sir."

There was less boastfulness in this answer.

The three pairs of eyes, all fixed intently upon his own in a sudden horror, had produced a sobering effect.

The black bonnet slipped from Aunt Lorinda's fingers to the floor. She clutched the arms of her chair, but said nothing. As for the bishop, he stood

Dr Thorne's Idea

staring at the boy, unable to reconcile this confession of a monstrous crime with a pair of eyes so overladen with purity and honor. Even Dr. Thorne, more familiar with Stephen's moral machinery, was still unable to believe.

"It was, of course, an accident," he said.

Steve shook his head slowly, but with a sidelong movement to add emphasis to the negative.

"You lost your temper, and became irresponsible?"

"No, sir. I did it on purpose. I did it for Mrs. Chauncey."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean because Mrs. Chauncey would never be happy again until he was dead." Turning to Aunt Lorinda, he added, "That very morning you said, 'There'll be no happiness for Bessie while that man lives.'"

Aunt Lorinda straightened up as if to speak, but sank back into her chair, and bowed her head. Steve saw the movement.

"'Twa'n't that alone," he added hastily, to relieve her from all responsibility. "I wasn't tryin' to lay it off onto you. I knew it anyway, from lots of things."

For this the lady gave acknowledgment by a motion of the head.

Dr Thorne's Idea

"Was that your only motive?" asked Dr. Thorne.

"Yes, sir, it was."

Dr. Thorne drew a long breath and closed his eyes. In the pause that followed, Stephen leaned back against the table, studying the cover of his book, "The Last of the Mohicans." Cato came a little nearer, looking up into his face inquiringly, as one who began to be bored.

"Then," said Dr. Thorne, still hoping for the best, "you can tell us what became of his fishing-rod."

"Yes, sir. It's up in the attic."

"Did you bring it home yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Run up and fetch it."

As Steve left the room with Cato at his heels, two questioning faces turned anxiously to Dr. Thorne.

"Can it be?" whispered Aunt Lorinda.

A shake of the head, as if in doubt, was the only answer.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the bishop.

Stephen's feet, clearing two steps at a jump as he ascended the stairs, were all that broke the silence.

"It is certainly hard to accept," said Dr. Thorne, at last, "yet I fear he is telling the truth." Then

Dr Thorne's Idea

with the deepest feeling he added, "Poor child! I would give much to prove that he was not!"

Steve, in the mean time, descended from the attic, the missing fishing-rod in his hand. As he passed the open door of Bessie's chamber, she recognized the familiar article and started to her feet. But the bearer in another instant was out of hearing, and scampering down the stairs.

When this bit of evidence was placed in Dr. Thorne's unwilling hands, his face grew sadder and he regarded it with a melancholy frown. He told Steve to lay it on the table. Steve obeyed, remaining in his old position, the three sable figures in a line before him.

The bishop, erect and impassive, one hand upon the back of Aunt Lorinda's chair, unable to believe yet knowing he heard the truth, was the next to speak.

"Had you already decided upon this deed, and were only waiting an opportunity to accomplish it?"

"Oh, no!" Steve answered quickly. "I never thought of it till just that minute. We were walking along, and just before we got to that narrow place, where it's so awful high and makes you dizzy to look over, I thought what an awful thing it would be for either of us to slip off; and then, right at

Dr Thorne's Idea

the same time, I remembered that if *he* should slip off it would be a mighty good thing for Mrs. Chauncey. But I hadn't any idea of taking such a mean advantage of him."

"Go on. Tell us just how it happened."

"When we got to the narrowest part he stopped and said, 'Steve, I'll give you a dollar to jump off.' And he laid his hand on my shoulder as if to make me do it. Then he sort of pushed me towards the edge. He may have been jokin', but it was mighty dangerous. And 'twas mighty one-sided, for I was the little feller. It made me mad. And he was always trying to do that."

"Trying to do what?"

"Trying to make me mad. And sometimes you couldn't tell what his game was."

The truth of this was acknowledged by affirmative nods of Aunt Lorinda's head.

"But he tackled the wrong feller that time. When he pushed *me* I pushed *him*."

As the narrator appeared to expect some recognition of the risks he undertook, the funereal auditors before him all acknowledged by look or gesture their appreciation of the hazard. And this acknowledgment was sincere. Whatever their opinions as to the righteousness of the deed, no doubt could exist regarding the ability of its execution. Mis-

Dr Thorne's Idea

taking their close attention for approval, he laid his book upon the table, that his hands might be free, and illustrated by occasional attitudes and gestures the position of the ledge and of Captain Chauncey, and how the victory was achieved.

"So I give—I *gave* him an awful push, just my whole weight—and I ducked. 'Twas lucky I did, for he clutched at my head and pulled my hat off. I couldn't see him when I ducked, but he must have kinder turned around—tryin' to recover himself, I guess—and he fell just on the edge, facing in, my way. He slid over and held on by his hands and one elbow. He was awful white,—scared lookin'. His chin was on the edge and helped hold him up. He thought it was accident, I guess, for he said, 'Quick, Steve, put your sleeve in my teeth and pull!' But of course I didn't. He would have pulled me over. His fingers quivered and slipped, and I saw he could hardly hold on, so I shook my head—like that—to say I wouldn't."

He paused as if the tale were ended, studying the knuckles of his left hand,—an action which Dr. Thorne had learned to recognize as an indication of embarrassment.

"Go on," he said gently. "Tell us everything, Stephen."

Looking down, then up, and rubbing the back of

Dr Thorne's Idea

his hand across his forehead, the narrator showed signs of agitation, the first during the interview.

"His face was awful white, and he looked at me hard—scared and mad both—and kind of whispered, for his voice wouldn't come."

"What did he say?"

Stephen hesitated.

"What did he say? You might as well tell us all."

There was a pause, but when the answer came it bore an ominous significance to those familiar with Captain Chauncey's prediction.

"He said, 'So you *are* a murderer!'"

This swift fulfilment of a heartless prophecy brought a chill of awe to Aunt Lorinda. With a new terror she regarded Stephen, who turned partly away and looked through a distant window, out into the rain beyond.

"And that was a lie," said Stephen, "because I am *not* a murderer. It all happened in a second. There was no good in my going over, too."

Cato, divining perhaps the necessity of encouragement, licked the hand that was nearest, thus notifying his comrade that one friend remained whose sentiments were unaltered.

"And then did he let go and—disappear?" asked Aunt Lorinda, in a low voice.

Dr Thorne's Idea

"Yes, ma'am. The whole business was only a minute. You see there wa'n't any place underneath for his feet, and his elbow kept slippin' off, so he—just had to go."

There was a silence; then the bishop took a forward step, folded his hands behind him, and in a manner not unkind yet suitably terrifying thus addressed the malefactor,—

"The enormity of this deed is evidently beyond your present comprehension. You fail to realize what you have done. If you did, you would be fleeing from the haunts of men with the shadow of the gallows across your path. Do you know the punishment for the crime of murder?"

Steve, deeply impressed either by the words or by the sonorousness of their delivery, had grown uneasy, and now looked up with a hostile frown. But he did not answer.

"For a man," continued the bishop, "the punishment is death; for you, the penitentiary."

Now, this boy had heard of penitentiaries, from another boy, who had been there, and he made a swift resolve never to enter one alive. As for Dr. Thorne, he regretted the bishop's speech, having in mind quite a different plan for bringing the sinner to a realization of his offence.

But the speaker continued,—

Dr Thorne's Idea

"Suppose the rest of us should take it upon ourselves to rid the world of those against whom we had the slightest grievance. Suppose—"

"But there wasn't any grievance!" interrupted Steve. "I didn't mean to do it! I didn't do it for myself; I did it—" He stopped, his glance moving suddenly to the door behind the bishop. The others looked about, and from Aunt Lorinda came an exclamation,—

"Bessie! You here!"

Standing in the doorway, pale, one hand against her cheek, Bessie's eyes wandered excitedly from Stephen's face to those about her. Taking a step toward her father, she exclaimed, in a voice scarcely louder than a whisper,—

"Can it be! Can it be!"

Dr. Thorne took one of her hands in his. "Why, darling, your fingers are like ice! Go back to your room for a time. Steve was only telling us—how it happened."

"No! I heard. It's awful, awful!"

She sank into a chair, her eyes, red from weeping, fixed in terror upon the face of her youthful adorer. Dr. Thorne observed it. Turning to the boy, he said in a gentler tone,—

"Go to your chamber, Steve, and remain until I send for you."

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Stephen, in passing near her as he left the room, stopped, looked somewhat timidly into her face, and was about to speak, when she shrank backward, overturning the chair as she rose to her feet. In so doing she breathed a word, inaudibly, and perhaps unconsciously, a word that Steve could only guess at. From the movement of her lips and what little he could hear, he guessed it to be "murderer."

Into his own face it brought an expression which rarely came there, an expression of dismay and of fading courage. He lowered his eyes; then, with a slight movement of the lips, he left the room.

There were callers that evening, relatives and friends, and the hour was late when Dr. Thorne retired, having had no time for talking with the evil-doer.

The next morning, as he dressed, he went over in his mind the most effective arguments for this misguided boy. He fully realized the necessity of gentleness and diplomacy.

Knowing this to be a crisis in his guest's career, he regretted the bishop's mistaken effort at intimidation; and this regret became a sudden apprehension as he espied a note beneath his chamber door. Who but Steve would place it there?

He picked it up and adjusted his glasses.





"THE MOON ON THE WATER" - J. M. W. TURNER

Dr Thorne's Idea

DR. THORNE,—Good by. I will not go to a pentenshary which is the same as prison. I am much obliged to you for my nice visit. All your goodness to me I ~~shall~~ shall never forget.

Affectionately yours,

STEPHEN WADSWORTH.

The front door was found unlocked. He had departed either late at night or very early in the morning, as no one in the town had seen him pass.

The only positive information was given that evening by the village doctor. Four miles from Lynstock, in the uncertain light of early dawn, he had met a mud-stained boy with a dog following closely at his heels. Both marched with drooping heads and through a soaking rain.

IX

OF the fugitives no trace was found; no clue whatever save the misty apparition reported by the village doctor. Although the expressman of a neighboring village had noticed a vicious-looking dog as he hovered about a freight-train, his description of the boy who accompanied him was too indefinite to be of value; and his observations of the dog were only from a distance, as he took especial care to avoid a close acquaintance.

To Dr. Thorne this disappearance was a serious blow. He felt the gravest anxiety in regard to Stephen's future, knowing well the influence of associates for good and for evil in the development of such a character. But all efforts to find him were in vain. Days, weeks, and months went by, and brought no news; yet the faithful friend never quite gave up the search. While still remembering and always on the watch for the name or face of Stephen Wadsworth, his hope grew fainter as the years went by.

Dr Thorne's Idea

Whatever the effects upon Steve himself of his unpardonable crime, its results, as felt by others, were far from melancholy. In the home at Lynstock there came a permanent peace; a renewal of the old relations, affectionate and without restraint, that in time brought the color to Bessie's cheeks. And the old-time laughter again was heard. Aunt Lorinda, when alone with her nephew, had more than once declared that Stephen was a messenger from Heaven, and that she often mentioned him in her prayers. It gave her pleasure to repeat a famous line which Dr. Thorne had often quoted,—

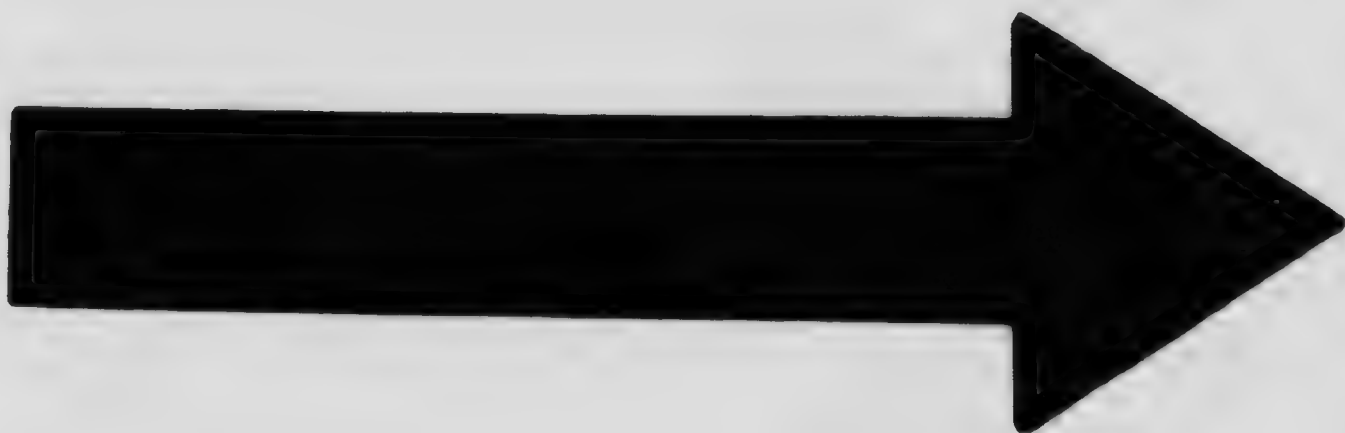
"Whatever is, is right."

On one occasion, as they were walking home together beneath the elms of Lynstock, she thus expressed herself,—

"If I were a youthful beauty and Alfred Chauncey and Stephen Wadsworth should present themselves as suitors, do you suppose that I would hesitate between them?"

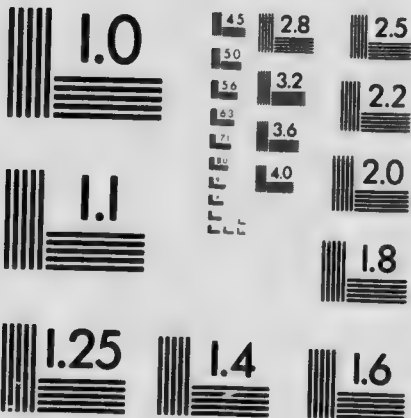
"Well, I don't know, Aunt Lorinda. But I do know one thing; and that is that the one you didn't like would not be long in doubt."

"Do you think I would hesitate a minute between a highly respectable, cowardly, lying, lazy, domestic bully and an open-hearted murderer, especially if he



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Dr Thorne's Idea

were, like Stephen, courageous, straightforward, and affectionate? Not for one minute!"

"Aunt Lorinda, you are hard upon the dead. Remember, *nil nisi bonum*."

"Rubbish! The bad were no better for now being dead. Would you hesitate yourself?"

"We are not called upon to decide that question."

"I am. And I know and you know, you would rather see Bessie in her grave than married to another Alfred Chauncey."

Dr. Thorne made no reply.

"Whereas Stephen," she continued, "with all his badness,—and Heaven knows he was bad enough!—had something that made you side with him, something you couldn't help respecting. You can admit *that*, I suppose, without endangering your soul?"

Her nephew smiled.

"Yes; I admit that."

His affection for the vanished murderer, although founded upon a short acquaintance, was solid and enduring.

But to Dr. Thorne there came a trial of a somewhat peculiar nature, and, in a sense, of his own creation. It even threatened to prove an obstacle to his usefulness.

Frequent allusion, in his sermons and in private

Dr Thorne's Idea

conversations, to the present comings of Our Saviour, while always doubted by the majority of his hearers, was at first accepted as the innocent hallucination of a poetic but over-credulous spirit. As years went on, this persistent faith in the testimony of a nameless witness came to be regarded as a mental weakness; and Dr. Thorne discovered by degrees that, instead of being welcomed as the herald of a glorious truth, he had become an object of compassion, and, at times, of ridicule. Those whose intimacy justified the liberty told him gently of his error. And then, in duty to himself and to his faith, he announced that he himself was the recipient of this visit,—that when in doubt whether to remain with his parish or devote his life to the criminal classes, Christ in person had appeared before him and hastened the decision.

This confession, instead of satisfying his friends, had merely convinced them that he himself, and not the nameless witness was the innocent victim of a delusion; all the more regrettable because of his splendid attainments and his previous sanity. But in this case as with many others the believer's tenacity—or conviction—was stronger than human argument. And he yielded not.

His knowledge of the world, however, and his broad experience soon taught him that to persist

Dr Thorne's Idea

meant the ruin of his usefulness. Nevertheless, in private when the occasion justified, when those in affliction would accept this consolation, he never hesitated to impart it.

For this compulsory silence there were compensations in the happiness of his daughter. It was five or six years after Captain Chauncey's death that Bessie for the second time ventured forth upon the sands of matrimony. But between Captain Chauncey and Mr. Robert Fletcher there was little resemblance. This second husband possessed but a single fault,—of domestic import,—and even that was not his own. It was the nature of his business. Being a civil engineer, his absences from home were frequent, and sometimes of long duration. These very absences, while a trial to the wife, were a gain to Dr. Thorne, as Bobbie, the marvellous, unexampled grandchild, became in such emergencies the companion of his grandfather. Together they drove and walked and played; they visited museums, panoramas, and the animals in the park.

One eventful afternoon in May, as they turned the corner of Fourth Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street. Bobbie pulled hard upon the hand that held his own, and brought his comrade to a halt.

“Look!”

Dr Thorne's Idea

There was excitement in his voice, and he pointed across the way.

Dr. Thorne looked. His eyes encountered a colossal pictorial presentment, in vivid colors, of the scene within the building—as youthful hopes would have it.

In the nearest foreground an elephant encircled with his trunk a Royal Bengal tiger, and pressed him to a gory death against his tusks. A second tiger lay crushed beneath his feet, while a third had sprung upon his flanks and was crawling upward toward the undaunted Orientals in the gold and crimson howdah. This episode, ignored by the other figures in its vicinity, had for its background an entrancing medley of lions and baby elephants, of clowns and Roman races, of zebras, hippopotami, and giraffes; of spotted ponies, gigantic anacondas, and tutored pigs, all apparently on terms of friendly intimacy. The air above was palpitant with acrobats in dazzling colors, with human cannon-balls, and maids in silken nakedness, wingless but serene.

“Grandpa, do they do all those things?”

Dr. Thorne, knowing that tigers were expensive, and being familiar with certain laws of gravitation, hesitated before replying. But no reply was needed—at least from him.

Beside them stood a group of ragamuffins, three of

Dr Thorne's Idea

whom were even younger than Bobbie. The fourth was older,—nearly seven, perhaps.

"Say, Patsey," said one of the diminutive, "it ain't really just like that, o' course."

The older boy, in a hoarse voice, and in pity for the ignorance of infancy, replied sententiously,—

"All what's in that picture they does. And more too."

Bobbie whispered in excitement:

"Did you hear that?"

His grandfather nodded.

After another glance at the poster, Bobbie looked up again into his comrade's face, and said, in solemn tones,—

"I have never seen a circus."

His grandfather winced. If the boy had said, "I have never tasted food," the words could have brought no deeper shame. For Dr. Thorne was a human grandfather. He had not only been a boy himself, but he remembered, as if yesterday, the delirium of his own first circus.

Bobbie saw his advantage and followed it up.

"Let's go!"

Dr. Thorne looked away and tried to think. He had many things to do that afternoon,—his weekly visit to an old man at Avenue A, that meeting at the hospital—

Dr Thorne's Idea

"Let's go *now!*" cried the tempter. "Yes! oh, yes! There are people going in! Quick! Let's hurry!"

But the grandfather's conscience was still awake. No; he must be firm. Another day would do as well. His duty first.

As this resolve was made he looked down upon the upturned, eager face. The eyes were sparkling with an irrepressible excitement; also they seemed upon the verge of tears, and there was a quivering of the under lip.

Five minutes later a big, benevolent face with heavy eyelids, appeared at the little window of the ticket-office.

"Have you two good seats, rather near?"

"Yes, sir; the best in the house."

And the agent, in violation of his usual custom, shoved along the tickets before his hand was on the money.

The seats were certainly good, but the distinguished clergyman experienced a slight annoyance at finding himself in the front row of the front box in the very centre of the building.

Not since early youth had he seen the circus, and now, as he found himself once again beneath the spell of sawdust rings, of trumpeting elephants, and of that reckless, rejuvenating music that tosses fluffy

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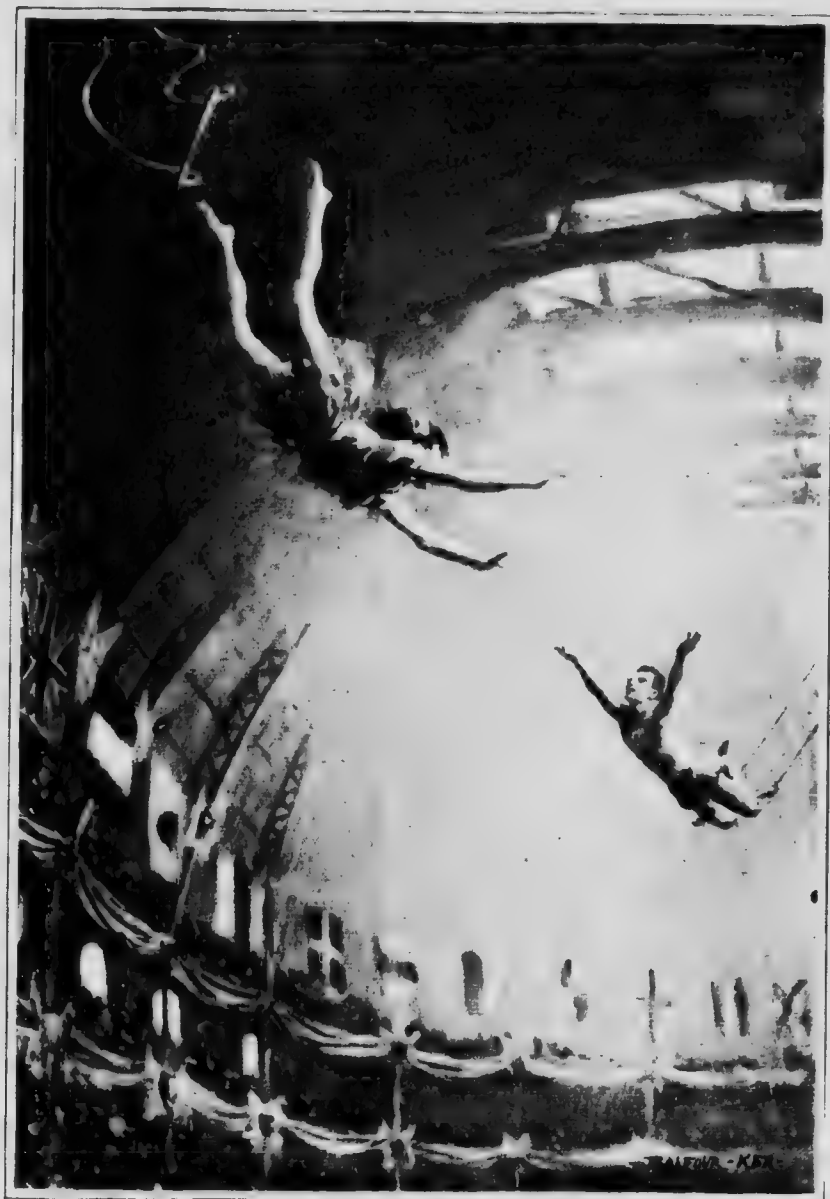
ladies into the enchanted air from horses' backs, he felt a quickening of the blood, a revival of boyish interest. And Bobbie's own enthusiasm was in itself a stimulant. His exclamations of delight and wonder were so frequent and inspiring that Dr. Thorne, without realizing it, was seeing the circus through his grandson's eyes; and both enjoyed it in a proper spirit. The performing elephants, the clowns, "The Champion Equestrian Acts by Four Arenic Queens," the Japanese balancers, the acrobats, the educated donkey, and the other dazzling delights were fully appreciated by the boy of six and by his comrade of sixty-nine.

One performance proved of especial interest. A young man of fine physique, accompanied by a girl of twenty or thereabouts,—she also in tights, but with a muslin fluffiness about the hips and a yellow rose in her hair,—were swung high aloft to the flying-trapeze. Upon the program they figured as the "Electrifying Bondinellis, whose Aerial Flights at Dizzy Altitudes, and whose hand to hand Catches in Space are the Wonder of Two Continents."

And the program in this case did not exaggerate. During these aerial flights Dr. Thorne gazed upward in silence fascination. while Bobbie, in the intensity of excitement, forgot to breathe.

This young man and girl sailed leisurely through





" ARE CAUGHT THE OUTSTRETCHED HANDS "

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space with the easy confidence of birds upon the wing. When they had attained a terrifying impetus upon a high trapeze, he let go his hold and floated upward and away, turned over in the air, all to the dreamy music of a waltz, and caught, with careless ease, an approaching bar that swung to meet him. Then, head downward, hanging by his legs, he swung to and fro, a tremendous distance.

The music stopped, and the girl in a solemn silence shot away from her own trapeze.

One half-suppressed scream was the only sound from the human sea below them, and thousands of straining eyes followed the flying figure in its course. And then, when hope seemed lost, when the error of a second's time meant a terrible descent, the strong arms of the living pendulum swung forth to meet her and caught the outstretched hands.

The band burst forth into a triumphant air, and the vast audience, with a breath of relief, broke out into a vigorous clapping.

As the trapeze swept backwards she clambered to the bar, and there, sitting aloft with smiling faces, this empyrean youth and maiden tossed to the audience beneath those volatile kisses we receive only from circus-riders, athletes, and the ladies of the ballet.

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While the girl returned to earth by a rope, the usual way, her companion climbed higher still, to another bar, at the very summit of the arching roof. There he stood up, and jumped. Head foremost he started earthward, and half-way down he turned over twice, not nervously or in haste, but leisurely, with a kind of bravado, as if time, space, and the laws of gravitation were unimportant trifles. With tremendous force he landed in the net upon his back and bounded upward over a dozen feet. The second time he landed on his legs, clambered to the edge, and lowered himself jauntily to the ground. Here he rejoined the girl. Then followed more applause, and in return more finger-tip kisses were tossed to the audience, which, instead of being far beneath, now towered above them.

In stepping from the centre of the arena, this dauntless couple, to avoid a flurry of incoming horses, approached within fifty feet of Dr. Thorne. He was watching them closely, indulging in a hasty speculation as to the rare mental and muscular outfit demanded in so hazardous a vocation.

The youth, after carelessly scanning, as he walked, the countless throng that arose in tiers above them, met the gaze that was fixed intently upon him. Both faces brightened with a sudden

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recognition. Dr. Thorne straightened up and leaned slightly forward.

Yes! There was no mistake. The honest eyes of Stephen Wadsworth were smiling back at him!

And there was little change. Fourteen years had simply developed without altering either the contour or the character of his face. But in the same instant he was gone, obscured with his companion in a confusion of advancing horses.

X

WHEN Dr. Thorne, on the following day, returned home for his noonday meal, he discovered that he had missed a visit from the newly found Stephen. Knowing there was a performance every afternoon and evening, and as he himself was rarely at home in the morning, he resolved to call at the circus. So, about three o'clock he betook himself to the Fourth Avenue end of the colossal building. Seeing an open door through which a groom with two white horses had just emerged, he entered. But a man stepped before him with the information, politely given, that no strangers were admitted. The visitor explained the object of his errand, but was told the rules could not be broken. As he took a card from his pocket to write a line for Stephen, a thin, sallow, black-bearded man stepped forward and raised his hat.

"Can I do anything for you, Dr. Thorne?" Then, in answer to an inquiring look, he continued, "You do not remember me, Simeon Bassett?"

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"Not the Reverend Simeon Bassett, who left for India to convert the heathen?"

"Yes, sir; the same."

"Well," said Dr. Thorne, "I never should have known you, Mr. Bassett. You have grown a beard since then. But isn't it a long jump from the missionary field to the circus?"

"Yes, sir; but an easy one. I found there was more profit and more peace of mind in reforming animals than in wrestling with the contented heathen."

"I am not surprised."

"I joined a company to furnish wild beasts for menageries and—well, it's a long story. But here I am, and I have been here for three years."

"And all for the best, I have no doubt. It may be hard on the animals, but the heathen should be grateful."

Mr. Bassett smiled.

"Yes, I remember you said something like that at the time. But I was younger then, and bound to go. Some of us are slower than others in learning to respect other people's opinions. But is there anything I can do for you here? Did you want to come in?"

When Dr. Thorne told his errand, the ex-missionary, who appeared to be a person in authority, led

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him inside, begged him to make himself at home, to come and go as he pleased, and to remain as long as necessary. Then, excusing himself, as his duties called him below among the animals, he took his leave.

Dr. Thorne, as he glanced about, could easily have believed himself in a waiting-room of the Circus Maximus, twenty centuries ago. The space itself, large, irregular, with a high ceiling, was the area enclosed by the outer corners of the building and the long, curving wall of the amphitheatre. A high archway opened into the arena. Two solid gates closed the lower portion, but above these could be seen the audience towering tier above tier, the countless faces bathed in a soft, warm light diffused by the canvas awnings high above. Music, laughter, and applause, with the snapping of whips and occasional shouts of performers were distinctly heard, while around him on every side moved figures in strange attire,—athletes, who might have been gladiators from the Colosseum; two drivers in the chariot races, whom he took at first for Roman matrons; a man in a scarlet tunic, a fillet about his head; ladies of shimmering limbs and scant attire, at home on the bareback horses; clowns, acrobats, and others, all strolling about or standing in groups. A few, encased in ample wrappers,

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always of the most vivid colors, moved here and there as in the Baths of Caracalla. Some were chatting and laughing, others practising their tricks or limbering their muscles. And to his left, drawn up in line against the wall, stood Roman chariots, one of crimson, one of white, and one of yellow, all with golden trimmings.

As he moved toward the arch, he was startled by an unfamiliar object close beside him, the pretty face of a girl, "The Champion Female Contortionist, La Belle Zedora," in tights, her supple form bent backward in a circle; and she looked pleasantly up at him from between her lavender legs. In mild astonishment he halted at this uncommon spectacle, and as he did so the two heavy gates were opened wide.

A band of actors for the high trapeze, some jugglers, and a bevy of clowns skipped out and away, and a pair of huge white horses guided by a man in a yellow tunic with silver bands, a foot on either steed, dashed out into the arena. He was followed by another rider in different colors, on a similar pair. And before the gates were closed a troop of performers came running in, athletes and tumblers in the gayest tints, some tight-rope dancers, and a comic family in evening dress: these, closely followed by liveried servants of the circus bearing

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three gigantic rolls of carpet just taken from the rings.

These rolls of carpet were deposited near the wall; and upon one of them Dr. Thorne found a comfortable seat upon which to wait for Stephen.

Close beside him a clown in grotesquely ample robes, black with orange stars and crescents, as he fondled the ears of the educated pig was arguing earnestly with "Miss Leonie Latour, the Living Arrow." A short distance from the closed gates, just far enough away to see above them, was gathered a group of acrobats, some in pink, others in blue or white or lavender tights, watching the performance on the high trapeze.

A flood of light, and it seemed to Dr. Thorne a flood of music, also, came down through the arch and enveloped this brilliant company. From two or three came a muttered "Ah!" and a deep-chested, solid little man, in creamy tights with a waist-cloth of emerald green, added,—

"Yes, and he missed it yesterday too."

A moment later, from the wild haste of the music and the shouts beyond the gates, the visitor knew that the four white horses with their standing riders were having a tumultuous finish to their race around the long arena.

As he sat watching this scene, so novel that it

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seemed unreal. he partook involuntarily of its spirit, —of its freedom, its brilliant colors, and its repressed excitement. The music, headlong, uplifting, and incessant, prevented any return to earth, and dispelled, for a time at least, all memories of his ordinary life. Even the errand that brought him here was driven to the background.

Beside the long, curving wall that divided this assembly-room from the arena, he noticed three figures as they came toward him,—a woman in a riding-habit with a scarlet jacket; another woman, slight, with delicate features and dressed in black; and between them a girl enveloped in a bright-colored wrap, such as many of the circus women throw about them when not performing. These wraps were long and loose, completely covering the figure, and generally of a brilliant color.

The girl, a little below the usual height, with black hair and a low forehead, had a wide, short, juvenile face. Her eyes were dark and far apart. To the observant philosopher upon the roll of carpet it was an attractive face, and one that aroused his interest. She seemed Italian or Spanish—something not American. But as they came nearer he found that she was speaking English fluently and without the slightest accent. At the present moment she and the scarlet equestrienne were laugh-

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ing merrily, while the older woman smiled in a perfunctory way, more from a sense of duty than from any inward pressure.

It seemed to Dr. Thorne he had seen this girl before. A moment later he thought he recognized her as the person who accompanied Stephen in his celestial excursions. Regarding her more carefully, he began to be sure of it. There, too, was the yellow rose in her hair he had noticed yesterday.

As they came nearer, she laid a hand on the older woman's arm, and, indicating the other end of the carpet upon which he was sitting, said in a pleasant voice,—

“Sit there, mamma, and don't get so tired as you did yesterday.”

In doing this, the front of the yellow wrap was opened, and he saw that she was in tights.

Nodding his massive head in acquiescence, Dr. Thorne returned the smile with which her eyes met his, and edged farther along. By a movement of the head and another smile, simple and friendly, she thanked him; then, after a word or two with her mother, she and her companion turned away and continued their walk.

He noticed, as he studied her with increasing interest, that her eyes were continually wandering toward a little staircase in a distant corner. This

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staircase, he decided, from occasional male performers who descended it, led to the men's dressing-room above. Her eyes seemed to travel in that direction of their own accord, and he believed that she would have been exceedingly surprised, and perhaps embarrassed, had she known that a casual observer detected the eagerness of her watch.

Moreover, this casual observer, being somewhat imaginative, wove a little romance.

She was in love with Stephen! Of course! How could it be otherwise? When a girl is launched into space twice a day with Death below, and invariably rescued by an adoring youth who never fails her what other result could be expected? And he, cool, brave, with arms of iron—and always there! She knew—probably—that he would rather miss a bar himself than be late at that aerial rendezvous.

As for Stephen's loving her, why, the cool observer himself was gently smitten, and merely from sitting here and watching her.

Belief in this romance of his own construction was strengthened by a look that came at last into the heroine's face. As her glance for the twentieth time wandered furtively toward the stairs, there came a sudden brightening of the eyes, as if illumined by a welcome message; a smile, a familiar

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nod, and Dr. Thorne, turning his own eyes in the same direction, saw without surprise the expected Stephen.

The young man, in pink tights, a dark blue wrapper tossed carelessly over his arm, strode with the swinging, half-clumsy gait of the professional athlete toward the approaching figures. The promise of a splendid physique given in his boyhood by the compensating Providence had been faithfully fulfilled. His straight, full neck, deep chest, and muscular limbs gave evidence of uncommon strength. With the Acropolis for a background, he would easily have passed at the present moment for some Olympian hero. His face, except that his chin and jaw were a trifle fuller, seemed but little changed; and with his greeting to his friends came the same frank, friendly smile that Dr. Thorne had first encountered in the little cemetery, fourteen years ago, that Sunday morning when they shook hands upon a bargain.

As the three were standing together,—the scarlet equestrienne, the girl in her yellow wrap, and the athlete in his shimmering silken tights,—the ponderous visitor, a sombre contrast in his every-day black, approached the gorgeous trio, and touched the gladiator upon the arm.

“Stephen Wadsworth?”

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The young man turned. His face lit up, and he seized the extended hand.

"Why, Dr. Thorne!"

Then followed expressions of surprise and pleasure, with many questions.

The two women backed away and continued their walk. Dr. Thorne looked earnestly into the clear gray eyes, now nearly on a level with his own; and he found they told the same old tale of purity and truth, of child-like confidence and incorruptible honor. He wondered if they were still misleading, and into what paths of vice or virtue their owner's peculiar morals had caused him to travel.

"And now tell me of yourself, Stephen. You would not believe me if I should say how often I have thought of you. Have you been a good boy or a bad boy? Tell me the truth. You know you can trust me."

"Indeed I do!" and Stephen began a rapid history of his career.

But the whole space was now filling up with mounted huntsmen in top hats and scarlet coats, they and their horses crowding every one against the wall. So the two friends walked away along by the wall, and Stephen told of his stealing a ride on a train, and of his joining a travelling circus, three days after leaving Lynstock; of how he and

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two other boys were taught somersaults, the high trapeze, forming pyramids, and various things; that he did this for four or five years. Then for a time he gave up the circus, but took it up again when he met Filippa.

"Filippa? Who is that?"

"She is the girl I act with. You must have seen her. She was talking with me just now."

"Indeed I did! And a most attractive little person! How long have you known her?"

"Oh, two years, about."

"Are you—is she—you are not married?"

"No, sir."

There was a silence; Stephen evidently hesitating, but with something to impart. Then, as they turned about to return, he stopped and said earnestly,—

"I want to marry Filippa, but her mother won't let us."

"Why not? Doesn't she like you?"

"No, she hates me."

"Why so, Stephen? What have you done?"

"Nothing. She gives no reason, only says she doesn't trust me."

"Is Filippa willing?"

"Oh, yes! Filippa's all right!"

Their eyes met and both smiled. The older man

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saw, in the younger one's face, the same outward manifestation of an inward content that he had observed in the maiden a very few minutes before.

"Well, it's too bad the parent is unwilling. Are you sure she has no reason for it? What were you doing the three years you were out of the circus business?"

The lover hesitated.

"But she has no idea of what I was doing then."

"Very likely, but what *were* you doing?"

There was another silence, during which Stephen looked down and picked at the band of silver lace about his wrist.

"Come, tell me! Perhaps I may help you in this business. I certainly will if I can."

The youth straightened up eagerly.

"Perhaps you can! You might bring her round!"

"But I must first know the man I am to bring her round to;" and the big brown face with the half-closed eyes moved slowly with a negative shake.

"Well, sir, if you remember, you made me promise that I would never steal again. It was after I took the cook's money."

"Yes, I remember."

"I have kept that promise. I have never stolen

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a thing since that day; " and he raised his face with a half-defiant movement, as if prepared to have the statement doubted.

" I believe you, Stephen," was the quiet answer.

" When I was dead broke and I needed money, I fell foul of an old pal of dad's who shoved the queer—that is—counterfeit money."

" Yes, I know."

" He made it, and I shoved it. But it wasn't stealing."

" No, not literally, perhaps, but too near it for moral comfort. You took what didn't belong to you every time you passed it."

" Yes, sir, I know that, but I had big temptations to break my promise literally, as you say. I never did, though."

Dr. Thorne laid his hand on Stephen's shoulder.

" My boy," he said gently, " I am not blaming you, for I can guess at your temptations. I know the obstacles you had to overcome, and your regard for your promise is greatly to your honor. How long is it since you have ' shoved the queer '?"

" Not since I promised Filippa."

" Ah! Then you told Filippa everything?"

" Yes, sir, everything."

" And still she is willing to marry you?"

" Yes."

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"And that temper,—have you outgrown it?"

Stephen's face became serious. He replied in a melancholy tone and there was a note of despair,—

"No; I suppose I never shall."

Dr. Thorne looked gravely into his friend's eyes.

"Have you told her that?"

"Yes, sir."

"The whole truth about it,—of how sudden, unreliable, and dangerous it is?"

"Yes, everything."

"And even that makes no difference?"

"No, sir, not a bit."

Dr. Thorne compressed his lips and looked thoughtfully away.

"How foolish women are!" he muttered.

The lover smiled, straightened up, and folded his arms across his chest.

"But I am just as foolish. Nothing could prevent my marrying *her*, either!"

"Nothing that she could do, however bad?"

"No, sir; nothing!"

His companion sighed. "Youth and faith,—what splendid things they are!"

As they started on, there came from the distant band a sudden pause; then, from around the curving wall, a din as of innumerable hammers, and again burst forth the music, louder and faster than before.

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"What is all that, Stephen?"

"Those hurdle-jumpers that we just left. At a signal they all start at once; the horses know the signal and get excited. That racket is their shoes on the wooden floor."

"Ah, yes, to be sure! But tell me how it is that, loving this girl and having, presumably, some regard for her safety, you can take her to crazy altitudes and induce her to throw herself into the arms of death? Of course you know, and perhaps better than I do, that the slightest error, if it failed to kill, would cripple her for life."

"No, the net is beneath; and, besides, I shall never miss her."

The serenity and confidence with which this was uttered filled the older man with a secret admiration. He looked again at the arms with bulging muscles, the full neck and chest, and the virile, somewhat lordly stride. Had Stephen been his own son, his pride and interest, his sense of responsibility and feeling of proprietorship, could hardly have been greater.

"And besides," added the gladiator, turning toward him with a more mirthful smile, "it is my one way of circumventing the old lady. She won't let me come near Filippa, and these are the only times we are alone together. We do all our talking

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and—and love-making up in the air. No one can overhear us, and to hold her hand is part of the performance.”

“Do you mean to say that in the midst of that life-and-death business you are billing and cooing? Demented children! You ought to have a guardian! Isn't there some reliable old chaperone to go up there with you?”

The lover laughed,—a triumphant chuckle.

“No, there are none to be had; but Mrs. Zabarelli would like to go up there herself mighty well!”

The older man shook his head.

“Don't get careless because you can do it easily.”

They found Mrs. Zabarelli with Filippa by her side, still sitting upon the roll of carpet.

The two women arose as Stephen presented his friend. Dr. Thorne was of a type rarely seen about the dressing-rooms of this or of any other circus, and both mother and daughter regarded him with a feeling of awe. But this visitor, from his life of promiscuous benevolence, had been for years familiar with every grade of society. His manner was genial, and sufficiently familiar to remove whatever constraint his clerical air and imposing presence might at first produce.

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"Stephen and I are very old friends, and are naturally very glad to meet again."

And his glance went from mother to daughter with a smile which included all in the pleasure of reunion. Filippa returned his smile with one yet warmer and more trusting.

As he looked down into the wide, short face, and into the eyes that met his own with a simple confidence, half timidly yet without embarrassment, he tried to remember what familiar picture she recalled. Was it some Italian portrait, or was it his photograph of a contadina? Or that woman in yellow by Lucca Giordano? Or could it be, after all, the Sistine Madonna? However, his heart went out to her, this cheerful, acrobatic innamorata of his newly recovered friend. One look into her face left little doubt of an affectionate nature and a sunny disposition. When she smiled, her whole face responded, the eyebrows lifting themselves further from the eyes and taking additional curves. Her mouth was not large in repose, but expanded when she laughed and showed two rows of very white and even teeth. There was something deferential in her manner, which at the same time gave the impression that she was waiting patiently for an excuse for mirth.

Dr. Thorne became soon convinced that she was

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a frank, reasonable, high-minded little person, and that her influence over Stephen must be greatly for his good.

In figure she was slight, although with a certain plumpness, and her sloping shoulders were well rounded. He observed that her bare arms, whenever they appeared from beneath the yellow wrapper, were also plump.

She endeavored, as they stood talking together, to conceal her interest in the admiring Stephen; and he also at times, as is the habit of lovers, overshot the mark and made clumsy, transparent efforts to ignore the existence of the being who was of more importance to him than sun, earth, air, or food. But the heavy-faced visitor saw more than his friend suspected. He observed from beneath the slumbrous eyelids various subtle interchanges, certain contacts of elbows prolonged and seemingly accidental, and occasional postponed avowals, which he knew would soon be uttered on the high trapeze.

After a moment's conversation, and when the constraint caused by an ecclesiastical presence had been dispelled, Filippa, with her head a trifle on one side, and with a thoughtful expression, said,—

“If you knew Stephen fourteen years ago, he must have been a little boy.”

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"Yes, he was a boy, but not so very little. He was eleven years old."

"Was he an interesting boy?"

"Oh, come, Filippa! What a silly question!" and the young man frowned and drew back a step.

"Well, yes," was answered in a serious tone. "Yes, he *was* interesting. But, of course, he was bad. All boys are that."

"Was he *very* bad?"

"Oh, no! And it was a good kind of bad, not a bad bad,—not a vicious kind of badness. And so we never quarrelled, and we had perfect confidence in each other."

As Filippa turned a triumphant glance toward her mother, Stephen nodded assent, but added,—

"There's no doubt of my confidence in you, sir, but I don't see how you could have had much in me."

Dr. Thorne, looking down into the face that suggested so many Italian resemblances, now upturned with the warmest interest to his own, said,—

"And I am forced to admit that I believe his virtues are many times greater than his faults."

There was pleasure in Filippa's eyes as these words were uttered, and she turned them with a childish pride upon the embarrassed youth. He thereupon, with a little color in his face, appeared

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absorbed in the contemplation of his knuckles. She reached forth and drew this hand toward her, straightening out the little finger. Upon it was a plain gold ring.

"Look at that, Dr. Thorne!" she exclaimed. "He has worn this ring for years, and now he can't get it off. He will surely have trouble with it, won't he? Can't you persuade him?"

"Persuade him! I will resort to brute force if necessary. What is it you wish?"

"I want him to have that ring taken off. His finger is in a horrid condition. Just look at it! Don't you think it ought to come off?"

"Certainly, I do. The flesh is inflamed. What is the matter with it, Stephen?"

"Oh, nothing! I scratched my finger the other day, that's all, and the ring is tight."

"Tight! I should say it was! Why, it is almost out of sight!"

"Yes," said Filippa, "and it is getting worse every day! He has a silly superstition against removing it. Do talk to him!"

"Seriously, Stephen," said Dr. Thorne, looking closely at the finger, "I really think it is a question of having either the ring or your finger taken off. I shouldn't trifle with it, if I were you. Why do you hesitate?"

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Stephen withdrew the hand, and answered after a silence,—

"My father gave it to me years ago, just before I turned up at Lynstock, and told me never to take it off. I have only done it once, when I had the ring made bigger; and this little scratch I thought would heal of itself."

"But you can have the ring enlarged and put on another finger. It may be a serious matter if neglected. Take my advice and don't trifle with it. Consult a doctor if you are in doubt, and see what he says."

"All right, sir; I will attend to it."

"But when?" asked Filippa, with a frown and a solemn shake of the head. "You have said that before, you foolish boy, but you never do anything."

"Attend to it this afternoon after the performance," said Dr. Thorne.

Stephen hesitated.

"Come, give me your hand, and promise on your honor that you will have it taken off to-day."

Stephen laid his hand in the extended palm, and replied,—

"All right, sir; I promise."

"Thank you," said Filippa, looking up into the

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clergyman's face; "I shouldn't wonder if you had saved his finger. He has been very horrid about it, just obstinate;" and with a reproving look she laid a very small fist upon Stephen's chest. From the character of the smile with which the trapezist looked down into Filippa's face, the visitor suspected that had the lovers been alone, the scene would have ended with less formality.

Stephen evidently felt that some explanation was required, for he added,—

"I don't know as my father really thought the ring could bring good luck, but I remember distinctly his telling me never to take it off; and I wanted to do as he said."

"Which is a good sentiment," said Dr. Thorne; "but I am sure—"

At this point the gates beside them were thrown wide apart, the environing space again was flooded with light and music, and the acrobats, clowns, Japanese jugglers, and various performers who had been hovering idly about, started forth into the arena, a medley of brilliant colors.

Filippa, with a slight change of color,—for appearing in her own limbs at close quarters before such a person as Dr. Thorne was a new experience,—threw off the yellow wrap and gave it to her mother; Stephen tossed his own to one of the at-

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tendants; then both, with a hasty adieu, joined the glittering throng and tripped through the archway, out into the glare and music.

Dr. Thorne caught a sudden glimpse—impressive, almost unreal—of countless faces rising one above another. He heard the cracking of whips and the clapping of hands; then dozens of horses with riders in scarlet coats—men, women, and children—came clattering through the opening with a tremendous pounding of iron shoes upon the floor. The gates as suddenly closed, and again there was calmness. And again the visitor admired the system and the quiet order which governed every detail of the exhibition. The riders dismounted, the horses were led below, and once more the space before the Roman chariots was comparatively vacant.

Finding himself alone beside the slender woman in black, he resolved to ascertain the real state of her feelings and to say a word for Stephen. This second resolve was not sanctioned by his conscience, as he felt that his own personal liking was no equivalent for the moral deficiencies of his friend, nor a reason for inducing any mother to select him as a son-in-law. No one knew better than Dr. Thorne that Stephen, while of interest as a psychological study and the possessor of admirable

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qualities, was not a suitor to meet the approval of a dutiful parent.

And what daughter, not blinded by love, would put her trust in one who had inherited a constitutional inability to discern right from wrong, with whom morality, as an abstract force, did not exist, and whose rage was not only entirely beyond his own control but of a murderous quality? Yet she existed, and he believed her a woman not only of the purest character but of fine perceptions.

Mrs. Zabarelli, slight of figure, and all in black, with Filippa's yellow wrap across her arm, stood leaning against the wall as one who finds any support a relief. She was a delicate woman, rather pretty; and as Dr. Thorne looked down into the sensitive, anxious face, he divined that she had known less of joy than of trouble, and that excess of caution had developed, as the years went by, into an habitual suspicion.

"Our seats seem to have disappeared, and I am afraid you are tired," he said. "Is there no place you can sit until your daughter returns?"

"Yes, sir; I sometimes sit in one of those chariots. They do not go in until Filippa comes out."

And she looked toward the nearest chariot, beside which stood a sumptuous figure.

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If Dr. Thorne had encountered this personage some centuries earlier, he might have taken him for a Roman general. The authorities of the circus, in selecting the costumes of their charioteers, had obviously been guided more by an eye to effect than by historical accuracy. A fillet of yellow ribbon about his head, a crimson peplum hanging from the shoulders, a chest and stomach heavily embossed in gold, were the impressive accessories to an Irish face.

This resplendent individual nodded pleasantly as they approached.

"Good-day, Mrs. Zabarelli. 'Are ye to honor my gig to-day by a sate on it?'"

"Yes, Mr. Phelan, if you are willing."

"Willing? I should say!"

And with the end of the crimson peplum he dusted the floor of his classic vehicle. He greeted Dr. Thorne by bringing a finger to his forehead in a salutation that suggested both the barracks and the stable. "And your charming daughter, Mrs. Zabarelli, in another minute will be sailin' through the heavens like an angel—as she is."

With a cock of his head he moved away, and remained in front of his four horses, conversing with a lady who resembled the mother of the Gracchi. She also was the driver of a chariot.

Dr Thorne's Idea

The floor of the cumbrous vehicle was the right height for a comfortable seat, but Mrs. Zabarelli hesitated, as she saw no place for her companion. But he insisted; and as she took it, his eyes fell upon a gaily painted tub close at hand, the tub upon which the baby elephant had brought shrieks of merriment from countless children. This he rolled a little nearer his companion, and he also had a seat.

"Our young people seem rather fond of each other," he began, coming at once to the point, as he knew the time was limited in which they were to be alone.

Into Mrs. Zabarelli's face came a troubled expression.

"Yes, they are, I think."

Then a pause. Dr. Thorne was diplomatic, and he knew his mission to be delicate. With a smile he continued,—

"If I were younger, I should put in a claim myself."

She tried to smile.

"Yes, Filippa is a good girl; everything in the world to me."

"And Stephen is a manly fellow."

"Yes, I suppose he is."

She looked down and smoothed Filippa's yellow cloak as it lay across her lap.

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"And improves as he gets older," his champion added.

She looked up, and regarded her ponderous *vis-à-vis* with a half-suspicious air. "There is great room for improvement."

"You refer to his hasty temper?"

"It is more than hasty," she said with animation; "it is murderous. He almost killed a man here, not two months ago!"

Turning partly about and indicating one of the ring-masters, a heavy muscular man, getting some horses into line, she continued:

"Mr. Wadsworth struck at his face, and Mr. Hacklander warded it off; but a second blow hit him somewhere below the heart, I think, and everybody thought he was killed. He sank to the floor and could hardly breathe for some minutes. His face was like chalk."

Dr. Thorne closed his eyes and slowly shook his head.

"I am sorry to hear that."

With a solemn, somewhat terrified expression, she added,—

"And that may happen to any one, to his best friends; for he says himself it comes and goes before he realizes what has happened."

"I hoped he had outgrown those attacks."

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"Oh, not at all!" she exclaimed. "If one of those blows should strike his wife, or any woman, it would kill her. No, I should be a bad mother to trust my daughter in such hands."

"Poor Stephen! I cannot express to you how sorry I am to hear this. But do you believe, Mrs. Zabarelli, that he would ever strike a woman, and above all his own wife? His anger, however violent, would certainly stop this side of that."

She shook her head.

"I should never trust him. And besides his temper, his eyes are—well, unpleasant."

"Unpleasant!" exclaimed her companion, in astonishment. "Why I never encountered a more honest pair! If he could only live up to those eyes he would be too immaculate for an earthly life!"

"Yes, sir, I know; and that I suppose is partly what makes me suspicious. They are too good. They are false, and they fill me with a kind of terror. It may be some horrid association," and she drew her hand across her brow as if to recall a fugitive memory, "but I feel there is danger behind them. I can't get over it, and I know it is not entirely imagination."

"It might be. People have often been powerfully influenced by fancied resemblances—by ideas that have proved stronger than their reason."

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"But there is something more than that. I feel—but I can't explain it."

Into the worn, anxious face had come an expression of dread, and the lips were drawn with a painful intensity, as if confronting some mysterious calamity. While Dr. Thorne sympathized with what he could not help regarding as a purely nervous condition, he felt that, in this particular at least, there was injustice to Stephen.

During the silence in which he hesitated for a reply, the music ceased, and he knew that Filippa was about to swing off into space, to be met by the dangerous lover, now swooping through the heavens like a retrieving angel, and guided by the unerring eyes whose truth and honor were being so bitterly denied.

Mrs. Zabarelli also knew what the silence meant. She turned her head to one side and closed her eyes. There was a short but absolute stillness, then a burst of music, followed by a clapping of innumerable hands telling them Filippa was again in safety.

With a gentle smile, as their eyes met, he said,—
"The false eyes, at least, are faithful to Filippa."

But the anxious mother was of too serious a mind to undertake a smile. She looked down and regarded her own hands, which lay clasped upon the

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gaudy garment in her lap. In a moment, however, she raised her face, and, bending slightly forward, said,—

"I know you think me very foolish to speak as I did of Stephen's eyes, but it is no fancy of mine and no prejudice. It is very real,—so real that sometimes when he looks at me for a moment, I almost remember everything."

Her companion made no answer, and she continued hastily, as she knew the present performance in the arena was now over :

"I would not do him an injustice for the world, as he is very good to us in many ways. He insists upon dividing equally with Filippa their weekly salary, when he of course does much more than she does. He really loves Filippa; I know that, but I must look out for her. No one should blame me for objecting to such a match."

"Blame you! Certainly not! Your first thought is naturally for your daughter, and rightly too. But let us try and know Stephen better. I shall find out all I can and be perfectly honest with you."

Both arose to their feet, as the gates had opened for the returning performers. With an encouraging smile he held out his hand. "Trust in me. I am an old hand at such matters. We will see that no harm overtakes Filippa."

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With a more contented expression and with a word of thanks she laid a hand in his.

Stephen and Filippa came running through the archway, pursued by the uplifting music. The mellow light of the amphitheatre behind them, the vast audience towering high on every side, the excited horses and their gayly colored riders dashing madly about the arena, were all far more impressive than as seen from the auditorium itself.

Filippa, whose graceful scantiness of costume suggested a spirit from more ethereal realms, tripped lightly toward them; and the yellow wrapper, outstretched by maternal hands, was thrown about her shoulders. The rose, which the visitor now saw to be of paper, had become unfastened, and was dangling from the hair, also looser and disarranged since its owner had swung head downward through the air. She was breathing hard; and as she shook hands with Dr. Thorne and said good-by, he saw in her eyes an exhilaration and content not produced by exercise alone.

Was love, so high above the earth, more thrilling than terrestrial avowals?

As she and her mother moved away,—the black figure and the yellow,—he made a resolve that all that lay in his power to brighten their future should be done, at whatever cost.

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He turned and confronted Stephen. The youth was smiling pleasantly upon him, and in his eyes he saw the same overflowing contentment. He also was breathing rapidly, as well he might. The last twenty minutes had been spent in a manner to test the hardest muscles and the coolest nerves. The happy, honest eyes moved involuntarily to the retreating figures with a tenderness and expectancy which may have penetrated the yellow robe between Filippa's shoulders; for she gave a backward look before disappearing around the curving wall—and a lingering, significant little nod. The amiable visitor concluded that this manoeuvre, from the manner of its execution, was of regular occurrence.

Stephen accompanied his friend to the outer door, and readily accepted an invitation to dine with him on the following day, which was Sunday. A moment later, when Dr. Thorne found himself again upon the sidewalk, surrounded by the commonplace scenes of daily life—men with trousers, women whose limbs were concealed by superfluous drapery,—and all the matter-of-fact dulness of practical existence, and with no music, he felt as if suddenly awakened from a dream. There was also a feeling of having descended at a single step from Imperial Rome to Manhattan Island.

XI

AS usual, after the performance that night, Stephen, with Filippa and her mother, left the circus and walked through Twenty-seventh Street to Third Avenue. This avenue, with its many lights, where all the world seemed out-of-doors, was, like many other New York avenues on a summer evening, a scene of gayety and animation.

As the three travellers stood waiting for an uptown car, the most conspicuous figure of the group was Stephen. His dark blue suit and colored shirt, his belt and russet shoes, were all in the prevailing summer fashion. And, altogether, with his truthful eyes and athletic figure he produced an acceptable impression of health and youth and vigor—and of surpassing honesty.

Filippa, like her mother, was dressed in black, and very simply, wearing no color except a spot of crimson at her throat and another in her hat.

They took an open car. Mrs. Zabarelli entered first, followed by her daughter, the young man last,

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keeping the outer seat. Mrs. Zabarelli, being suspicious, cast occasional glances toward her daughter's lap. Filippa, aware of these suspicions, folded her plump little hands before her, and conversed gaily upon every subject, as if no lover were in sight. But the spirit that laughs at locksmiths directed one of Stephen's hands to the nearest arm, the sleeve of which, being short and somewhat open from the elbow down, seemed to favor this manoeuvre. So during their journey—of a mile or more—he achieved two triumphs: one, the circumvention of a watchful parent; the other, the maintenance of a spiritual intercourse in which compressions, strokes, and taps conveyed subtle and multitudinous meanings. A general statement of ordinary significance when accompanied by one of these secret messages, took on at once a revivifying interest. Moreover, that hilarious little current that flies from lover to lover, even at fingers' contact, expanded, in a case like this, to an intoxicating revel.

When Filippa, in descending from the car, placed her hand in Stephen's, it received a gentle yet emphatic pressure,—a tender, melancholy, yet assuring grasp; for this was their adieu as regarded intercourse of that character, both believing that until tomorrow afternoon, on the high trapeze with thou-

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sands looking on, they—the hands— would probably have no chance for meeting. This pressure was affectionately returned.

Eastward, toward the river, Filippa in the middle, they walked along the quiet street,—and slowly, for the night was warm.

Filippa was the first to speak.

"He seems a very nice man, your friend?"

"What friend?"

"The big clergyman who was at the circus this afternoon,—Mr. Thorne,—so kind and gentle."

"The best man in the world!" said Stephen.
"You can bet on *him*, and every time. He was mighty good to me,—took me right into the family, like his own son."

"When was that?"

"Oh, thirteen or fourteen years ago."

"And did you stay there long?"

"A couple of months, I guess."

"Yes," said Filippa, reflectively. "I remember your telling me something about it. But if he was so good to you, why did you leave?"

"I forget."

Mrs. Zabarelli's ears, as Stephen knew, were always on the watch for something to his injury, and he had no intention, at least when she was present, of assisting in his own defeat. Her hostility was

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open; she made no concealment of her antipathy for this perilous lover.

"Mamma says she used to know him."

"No, I didn't say that," said her mother. "I only used to hear him preach occasionally. Hasn't he some odd belief, or other?"

"I don't know," replied Steve. "I forget about that."

"Something about Christ not being dead and still going about the earth?"

"Oh, yes," said Stephen, "I remember. That was it, I think. Some folks thought he was a crank, but it was only in that business. He isn't any fool."

"Gracious, I should say not!" exclaimed Filippa; "he seems awfully wise."

"He is," said Stephen.

The last house in the block, the one farthest to the east, an ordinary three-story dwelling, was precisely like its score of neighbors, except in its possession of windows toward the river. It was now a boarding-house.

"I am afraid you'll find the hall kinder dark, Mrs. Zabrelly," said the landlady, who was standing on the steps for a breath of air before retiring. "It's after eleven o'clock, and I thought you was home. I could 'a' waited just as well."

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"Oh, it doesn't matter. We know the stairs;" and giving the key to Filippa, she remained for a few words with Mrs. MacFarlane, while the younger people entered the house and began a cautious ascent of the unlighted stairs. Reaching the third and steepest flight, Filippa halted on the second step.

"Sometimes this very last climb is really too much."

"Then why don't you take the elevator?" demanded Stephen, so close behind that he was almost touching her.

Turning partly around and reaching toward his face, hardly visible in the darkness, she took hold of his chin.

"What nonsense are you talking? What elevator?"

"This one."

And he put one arm behind her knees, the other across her back, and before she realized his purpose, swung her high in the air, as lightly as if she were a doll.

"Oh, Stevey!" she whispered, "put me down! What would mamma say?"

"Nothing, because she'll never know."

"How bad you are—and how strong!"

"What's the use of owning an elevator if you

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never use it?" And he carried her to the final landing, and without an effort.

"Well, here we are," she said. "Now let me down."

"But it's fun to hold you."

"No, you mustn't, Stevey! Besides, mamma will be coming in a minute."

"She hasn't started yet."

"But you mustn't! Now, behave!"

"If you were in my place, would you obey?"

"Of course I would!"

Steve laughed.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, Filippa! You wouldn't be such a fool. You wouldn't drop the nicest girl in the world if you once had her like this."

Although too dark to see much, he knew she was smiling, or something very near it. As her face was drawn closer to his own, she laid a protesting hand across his mouth; but against Stephen's strength such an inconsiderable affair as Filippa's hand was of no avail.

Five minutes later, when Mrs. Zabarelli entered her parlor, she found Filippa arranging their very simple supper upon the table, while the bad young man stood innocently by the open window, from which he overlooked the avenue and the vacant lot, and could see across the river to Blackwell's Island.

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The parlor of the Zabarellis, although with two windows to the south and one to the east, would have been dingy and commonplace except for Filippa's love of color, inherited in all its fulness from her Neapolitan father. His portrait hung above the mantle. Occasional cushions, scarfs, and rugs of vivid but harmonious colors gave life and cheerfulness to an apartment whose other accessories had reached a shabby senility.

This nightly supper was a compromise. The young people after their evenings at the circus required something in the way of food, and during the earlier days of their present alliance they had taken it at restaurants. But restaurant suppers were expensive, and the Zabarellis were poor. Stephen joyfully played the host, but Mrs. Zabarelli, unwilling to continue placing herself under obligations to one whom she distrusted and opposed, insisted upon these banquets being served at home,—at least her own proportion of them.

One of Filippa's ambitions was to make these little reunions enjoyable, in spite of her mother's presence,—which was a chilling influence to overcome,—and to-night the little chandelier in the centre of the room above the supper table was blazing at its full capacity. Its full capacity was but four very ordinary burners, and the feast consisted

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merely of ham, potato salad, bread, butter, and cheese, with two bottles of lager beer. But to herself and Stephen these were details of minor importance. And in spite of the inevitable results of her mother's open hostility to the guest, they always enjoyed these little feasts. To-night, as usual, the meal passed cheerfully, and fulfilled its mission of keeping two people in each other's presence for an additional hour.

As they arose from the table, Mrs. Zabarelli went into the other room. Filippa, taking one of Stephen's hands in both her own, said with a nod of approval as she examined it,—

"You are a good little boy to keep your promise. Your finger will soon be well again, I know."

"Very likely. But what do you think was inside the ring?"

"Was it hollow?"

"No, I mean written along it, on the under side."

"I'm sure I don't know. Some inscription from your mother to your father?"

"Oh, no! More mysterious than that."

Filippa with increasing interest, as if approaching some awful secret, whispered,—

"Not from some other lady to your father!"

"No; but you'd never guess. See for yourself;" and from a pocket he brought forth the ring, now

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severed and drawn wider open, and he laid it in her hand. She held it to the light and studied the inscription.

"Why, Stevey! My initials! How curious! But it can't be possible!" Then with a look of suspicion she took a backward step and slowly shook her head. "How simple I am! But it's very nice of you to give it to me. And it's a good wish: 'God Bless the Wearer.' You did fool me, though, for a minute."

"What do you mean—fooling you? I'm not fooling you, Filippa. You mean I had it written? No, I swear I didn't! That is just as the ring has always been ever since I've worn it, but I had forgotten all about that writing. But I was goin' to give it to you all the same, as soon as I saw those initials. It might bring you good luck. I wouldn't give it to anybody else, though! You can bet on *that!*"

"I believe you, Stevey;" and she laid a hand on his arm, looking up into his face with the smile that had stirred the Italian memories of Dr. Thorne and brought him confusion of Madonnas. This smile—and it was not uncommon—was unfailing in its effect upon Stephen; creating a desire for heroic deeds,—deeds requiring strength and amazing courage, or some gigantic sacrifice, to prove to her, once

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for all that he was hers, absolutely and forever.

He took her gently by the shoulders, but before proceeding farther turned his eyes toward the chamber. It was well he did, for as he looked Mrs. Zabarelli was coming through the doorway.

"What do you think, mother!" exclaimed Filippa, holding the ring toward her. "What do you suppose it says inside this ring of Stephen's?"

"I don't know, I am sure," was indifferently answered, with a glance yet more indifferent in the direction of the lover, as he strolled toward the window after a sudden release of Filippa's shoulders.

"But, really, mother, it's most extraordinary. It has my initials, and they have been there all these years."

Her mother, with feeble interest and merely to gratify her daughter, took the ring, adjusting her glasses, and read aloud the inscription,—*"To F. W. Z. God bless the Wearer."*

"Yes, that's very curious," she said, in a manner, however, that was disappointing from its unconcern.

"But, mother dear, don't you think it a wonderful coincidence that somebody else should have my

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initials, which are so unusual, and that Steve should be wearing them all these years?"

Mrs. Zabarelli seemed not to hear. She had removed her glasses and closed her eyes, her thoughts drawn suddenly into the past by this once familiar legend.

Turning about, she confronted the approaching Stephen. He halted in surprise at the sudden change in her expression. The careworn, anxious face was now ablaze with anger, the eyes dilated from an unwonted excitement, obviously beyond her own control. So swiftly was her arm extended that he took a backward step to avoid the quivering finger that pointed at his face.

"I remember you now! It all comes back! And those honest eyes! For years I have been trying to place them. And you have the insolence, the brutal, brazen insolence, to come into my house. Leave it! Leave it, and never enter it again! Murderer, robber!"

The color left Stephen's face. He glanced at Filippa, who seemed bewildered by her mother's language. In a low voice he asked:

"What do you mean, Mrs. Zabarelli?"

"What do I mean! You know even better than I do what I mean! And that ring with its inscription is a surprise to you!"

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And she laughed; but the laughter was in irony, and so mirthless and unnatural that the listeners thought her reason was affected.

"Oh, yes, you are surprised! And *I* was surprised that day on Staten Island, fourteen years ago, when you came into my home and robbed me of all I owned. And my child and I have been in poverty ever since."

The ring, as she finished, slid from her trembling fingers, and rolled into the obscurity of a corner, its mission accomplished.

"But really, ma'am, I don't know what you mean," said Stephen earnestly, laying a hand upon his chest as in protestation of his innocence.

More calmly she answered, but with bitter contempt,—

"Of course not! But the denial is of precious little value coming from a man who can rob a helpless woman, and kill her child if necessary to accomplish his purpose."

Steve, with changing color, stared intently at Madame Zabarelli in a despairing effort to understand her words.

"Mother dear," said Filippa, gently, "there must be some mistake. You say fourteen years ago, and fourteen years ago Steve was only ten years old. And this robber was a man, wasn't he?"

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Her mother frowned, as in a confusing mental struggle, nervously brushing the hair from her temples.

"Don't you see, mother dear, it couldn't be Steve? It was some entirely different person."

"Then it was his father!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I shall not forget that face! Nor those lying eyes! You have said yourself that ring was given you by your father. No child of mine shall associate with the son of such a parent. Never! never! never!" she repeated with increasing emphasis. Then, regarding him with an infinite scorn, she demanded,—

"Is that clear?"

Along his veins and through the tissues of his brain throbbed warnings of a hovering enemy, his mother's rage; but he had confidence in his self-control.

"Filippa," he said gently, "of course you don't want to go against your mother, but you wouldn't throw me over entirely, would you?"

Before her daughter could reply, Mrs. Zabarelli again spoke out,—

"As my whole life has been a sacrifice for Filippa, I do not expect to be deserted at the first call of a stranger, and above all for a stranger of *your* antecedents!"

Filippa, now summoned without warning to make

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the decision of her life, loving each and willing to make any sacrifice of herself for the good of either, turned entreatingly toward her mother. With both hands upon her arm, she began to speak.

But Mrs. Zabarelli was not a woman to relinquish victory when once achieved. She drew away her arm, and, ignoring Filippa, stepped nearer Stephen.

"That ring your father took from Filippa when he entered my house and robbed me, with a loaded pistol, of all the money I possessed. I have found since that he was a professional thief and murderer, a sharper, a blackleg, a common criminal, with no pretensions to decency or honor. And you, the image of him, his own true son in soul and body, I have seen through ever since you joined us. Your lying eyes have never fooled me. And your brutal, murdering temper is the temper of a—"

But Stephen heard no more, and he heard but dimly the last few words as they rent the barriers of his rage. A flood of fury, hot, blinding and resistless, surged like a bursting torrent through his brain. His eyes saw, but they told him nothing. They only showed him the hostile face before him, and he struck madly out. It was a blow to kill, if kill he could.

At the transformation in his face Filippa flung

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herself before her mother. Upon her upturned chin she met his fist, then sank upon the carpet, limp and motionless.

The arm drew back for another blow, but as he advanced to launch it, striking with his foot the form upon the floor, the wildfire flickered in his brain, then died away as suddenly as it came. He stopped, staggered backwards, and drew a hand across his eyes as if to hasten his returning reason. The mother's terror-stricken eyes moved from Stephen to the figure at her feet; she stooped, and with her feeble strength endeavored to raise her daughter from the floor.

To his horror Steve saw Filippa's head sink back, an unresponsive weight. Her face, except the purple bruise upon her chin, had a lifeless pallor. Beside her, upon his knees, he also dropped, exclaiming in a voice of agony,—

“Oh, my God! my God!”

“Take her to the bed,” said Mrs. Zabarelli, forgetting all except her daughter's danger.

Carefully he rose to his feet, the burden in his arms; and as he followed Mrs. Zabarelli into the chamber, he turned the girl's cheek against his own and muttered an incoherent appeal. Gently upon the bed he laid her, while the mother's hands arranged a pillow.

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"Now run for a doctor!" she exclaimed.
"Quick! quick, and don't lose a second!"

He was off, as the words were uttered, down the dark stairs in reckless leaps, out into the silent street, leaving the door wide open behind him.

He remembered a doctor's sign half-way along the block, and up the steps of that house he sprang and pulled the bell. All the inmates were abed, for it was after midnight. He rang again and again, and it seemed hours before the door was opened.

"I want to see the doctor, quick!"

"Dr. Hasselmann is out."

"Out! How soon will he be back?"

"Oh, he might return in ten minutes and it might not be for an hour or two."

"Isn't there another doctor near?"

"Yes, sir; at No. 65, about the middle of the next block."

In another minute Stephen was ringing the bell at No. 65, and with better luck.

This doctor, an elderly, gray-haired man, hurried on under the young man's guidance, asking certain questions concerning the nature of the accident. Steve told him all, only omitting that the "accidental blow" had been aimed at another

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woman. Up the dark stairs he led the way, and when they entered the Zabarelli parlor the physician was somewhat out of breath.

He passed at once to the chamber, and bent over Filippa.

When he looked up, first at the mother and then at Stephen, his kind, serious face told them, before a word was uttered, that all was over. He said something about death having been instantaneous, and spoke of concussion of the brain. Mrs. Zabarelli, who had suspected the truth, seemed dazed by grief. Mechanically she seated herself in a little chair by the bed, and began to rock.

With dry lips and a husky voice Steve asked if nothing could be done, if there was no possibility of this condition being only temporary.

"Surely there must be some way to bring her back, doctor!" he whispered. "You don't mean she's dead—gone forever!"

The man of science laid a hand gently upon his shoulder.

"Yes, but nothing could have been done to save her. Life was, perhaps, extinct before you left the house."

And with a few words to the mother he departed.

Long afterwards Stephen, as in a hideous trance,

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stood motionless by Filippa's bed. He shed no tears. There were no outward signs of grief.

At last, turning slowly about, he walked into the parlor. For completer solitude he turned out the gas, and threw himself upon the floor, his face buried in his hands.

XII

WHEN Stephen raised his head, a faint, cold light had crept into the room. He shuddered, for the light of day was not for such as he. There were things too cowardly and too vile to face the glare of heaven. Climbing slowly to his feet, he approached the open window.

With a kind of terror he regarded the colorless radiance in the east spreading slowly upward into the starlit sky. It seemed to his shrinking gaze like something sent to hunt him; something that would overtake him if he lingered. Pure and calm, it flickered along the surface of the river, and the river brought a welcome thought. Beneath the waters there was peace. No lingering here, no sacrifice within his power, could bring back Filippa, or palliate the unutterable crime. But there, at least, was oblivion.

For a last look upon what had been dearer to him than all the world—for whose life he would cheerfully have given up his own—he moved toward the

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chamber. But in the doorway, as his eyes encountered Mrs. Zabarelli gently rocking, just as he had left her long hours ago, he halted. Was her reason gone? Had he killed two women with a single blow? When he stood before her and spoke her name, she ceased rocking and looked up, But in her face came no look of recognition. After a questioning glance she lowered her eyes and continued rocking.

Mechanically he turned out the light. Moving to the foot of the bed, he looked down on the silent figure, now doubly solemn in the ghostly light that entered from the eastern windows.

There seemed in this frigid radiance, as it lay upon Filippa's face, something spiritual and unearthly, as from another world. Standing at her feet, he recalled, with another pang of remorse—such as had been burning into his brain through the hours of night—her unwavering confidence in himself, her readiness to swing from any height if only he were there to catch her, her persistence in taking upon herself all blame when it would place him in a better light before her mother, her cheerfulness, her loyalty, and her courage. And before his dry, hot eyes, the bed, the woman rocking by its side, and the room itself began slowly to revolve in widening, swifter circles. His brain also seemed

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to float away. Staggering backwards, he sank into a chair.

But the dizziness soon passed. Dropping upon his knees at the foot of the bed, he bent forward and reverently touched his lips to the sole of one of Filippa's shoes. Then he climbed to his feet, and after a parting look at the stricken mother still rocking to and fro, unconscious of his presence, he turned and left the room.

Down the dark stairs, out into the street, where the lights from lamp-posts glimmered yellow and useless in the advancing dawn, he kept his course with outward calmness.

Nearing the avenue, he halted in surprise as he recognized an approaching figure. Too well he knew the walk and the ponderous, familiar form to be mistaken. He also knew that Dr. Thorne must be returning from some errand of mercy, and instinctively he contrasted it with his own black deed. His first impulse was to cross the street; but his old friend had already recognized him.

"Why, Stephen, what's the matter?"

The tone of alarm was involuntary, as the face before him was that of an older man than the Stephen Wadsworth of the afternoon before. Dark hollows beneath the eyes; a tension of the lips, the

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pallor, and the whole expression told plainly of a conquering sorrow.

The murderer shrank within himself as he encountered the anxious, friendly scrutiny. Even the voice was not his own in which he answered,—

“An accident to Filippa.”

“Oh, I am sorry—sorry! What is it? How did it happen?”

Stephen looked away, but his face told the inward agony which choked his speech.

“Is there nothing I can do?” continued his friend. “Cannot I go there, and be of service?”

“Will you?” exclaimed Stephen. “Will you go there?” and he pointed to the house. “That first door on the right; it is open. They are at the very top, on the front. Will you really go there?”

“Certainly, of course I will! And you return soon, I suppose?”

“Yes.”

They parted, and Stephen felt, as from a knife, a sharp regret that his final word to such a friend should be a lie. But what mattered a lie after a deed like his! When Dr. Thorne should find Filippa had been murdered, and by him, his contempt and loathing would be far beyond the influence of lies—or of all ordinary human sins.

With heavy, unobservant eyes, and lips com-

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pressed, he strode across the vacant lot toward the wharf. This piece of ground, between the Avenue and the East River, about the size of an average city block, was of uneven surface, and at present served merely as a playground for the children of the neighborhood. He followed the wagon track that led across it to the wharf.

Reaching out into the river about an hundred feet, this wharf, but little used, bore a deserted, somewhat melancholy aspect. Alongside lay a solitary craft, a heavy schooner, close against the land. Her cargo of paving-stones, partially unloaded, was scattered along the pier.

Out upon the wharf, about a third its length, he had walked with firm and even steps, when he stopped and turned about. The sleeping city before him showed no signs of life, save the steam and rattle from a distant train upon the elevated road, and a mail-wagon as it disappeared around a neighboring corner.

In the slowly brightening sky above the window of the room in which Filippa lay, a group of stars still glittered through the spreading light. The window was open, as he had left it. With his eyes upon this window, he moved his lips responsive to something in his soul akin to prayer; but the prayer was not for himself. He closed his eyes, raised his

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face toward the sky, and drew a long, deep breath which ended in a gasp.

As he turned about and took a forward step along the wharf, he halted in surprise at seeing the figure of a man not a dozen feet away. He opened wide his eyes, then closed them, believing it a vision of his feverish brain. One moment ago no human being was in sight.

The figure approached, and even now, in the uncertain light, he half doubted its reality. To his weary eyes it mysteriously blended with the radiance behind, the expanding, many-tinted splendor announcing the dawn of day.

Coming close to Stephen, the man stood before him. He was young, but little over thirty, and tall, with a slight stoop about the shoulders. From his simple, somewhat ordinary clothes, Stephen judged him to be a master mechanic,—a mason perhaps, or a carpenter. But the face was less usual. The features were regular, the eyes a dark blue, and singularly gentle and expressive. A brown beard grew in two points from the chin.

Reaching forth a hand, he rested it on the murderer's shoulder,—

"Life is yet before you, Stephen. You have made a good fight, but your burden was beyond your strength."

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'And as the compassionate eyes were fixed upon his own, Steve experienced a new sensation.

It might have been a form of personal magnetism, or mayhap this stranger possessed the power of imparting to those with whom he came in contact a portion of his own nature; but whatever the cause, Steve realized within himself the birth of a new hope, of a new and different kind of courage. Moreover, he was indefinably impressed by something in the expression, and in the voice and manner, of this unexpected friend; by a certain gentleness and thoughtful gravity that suggested a wider experience than his apparent age would justify.

Such was his influence, that Stephen, after a very few words of encouragement, was walking by his side across the vacant lot, then along the street toward the Zabarellis.

The stranger entered the house as if familiar with it and mounted to the upper floor.

Without knocking he turned the knob of Mrs. Zabarelli's parlor, and went in. His hat, of soft black felt, of common shape, he laid upon a table near the door. Stephen followed, close behind; and he noticed that Dr. Thorne, who was talking with Mrs. Zabarelli near the window, took a step or two forward when he saw the stranger, a look of pleasure and recognition upon his face. His greeting

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was returned, which caused Stephen to believe that they already knew each other. And it also appeared, from the deference with which Dr. Thorne addressed him—Dr. Thorne being much the older of the two—that he might be a person of more importance than his attire betrayed. But he lingered for a moment only, then passed on into the chamber.

The others followed. The little chamber was all aglow with rosy light, from the crimson sun just showing above the trees beyond the river. And on the opposite wall stood purple shadows of the anxious group.

"Is there any hope?" demanded Mrs. Zabarelli in a tremulous voice, with an appealing glance to the stranger. "Can you do anything for her, doctor? Oh, it's too late! too late! I know it's too late!"

Making no reply, but seating himself upon the bed beside Filippa, he drew a hand across her forehead, gently, as if smoothing her hair, and uttered, in a low voice, words not understood by those about him.

So great was Stephen's confidence in this man, strengthened by the knowledge that certain trances had frequently been mistaken for death itself, that he was not amazed by what now occurred.

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The color came creeping back into Filippa's face; her bosom rose, responsive to a long, deep breath, as if awakening from a sleep; her eyelids moved, then slowly opened, and she looked about.

Blinking, as one not fully awake, she looked up at the face above her, now illumined by the light through the eastern window—a rosy, supernal light that seemed to enfold him with a glorifying touch.

“Why, what has happened?”

Then, with a glance at those about, she added,—

“Oh yes, I remember!”

And seeking Stephen with her eyes, she filled his soul with an infinite joy. The look was a message that told of more than forgiveness. In the flood of feelings that overwhelmed him, his face, haggard and sensitive, spoke plainly of his gratitude. And then it was that his eyes met those of the stranger, who smiled—a simple, brotherly smile, so expressive of fellow feeling and encouragement that it created in Stephen a warmer sentiment toward him; a sudden affection hitherto forbidden, probably without intent, by the man's gravity and reserve.

Mrs. Zabarelli had stood by the bed in breathless anxiety, apparently unable to accept the evidence of her senses. But when her daughter, with the stranger's aid, arose and stood upon her feet,

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she convulsively embraced her and wept aloud from excess of joy.

"Why, it's like coming to life again, Filippa! We thought you were dead!"

She stroked her hair and patted her cheeks, crying and laughing by turns.

She soon recovered, however, and, turning to Filippa's rescuer, who was replying to some question of Dr. Thorne's, she said with earnestness,—

"How can I thank you, sir! You have given me back my daughter. Is there nothing I can do to prove my gratitude?"

Indicating Stephen by a gesture, he answered,—

"Yes, by giving your daughter to this man. Henceforth he shall be worthy of your confidence."

Mrs. Zabarelli frowned and was about to protest. But as she looked searchingly into the stranger's face, a closer study may have brought a fuller trust, or she also may have yielded, like the others, to some indefinable personal influence. However, after a questioning glance at Dr. Thorne, who bowed his head in emphatic approval, and a look at Stephen, whose face bore a gentler expression since the night before, she answered,—

"I will do it."

At this consent, so long desired, so unexpected when it came, the incredulous lovers looked in-

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stinctively into each other's eyes for further confirmation of tidings too good to be believed. Filippa turned impulsively and kissed her mother.

With a parting word the stranger moved toward the door. Stephen grasped him by the hand, and exclaimed with feeling,—

“And for myself, too, I don't know how to thank you! I shall be all right after this. I know it. I—I didn't deserve such help.”

Returning the pressure and looking kindly into the lover's eyes, the man replied,—

“Have no fear. You will be master of yourself.”
And he departed.

Dr. Thorne with the grateful mother followed him to the parlor door, but a warmer interest drew Stephen back into the chamber. Approaching the girl whose good opinion he felt he had no right to claim, he said in a low voice,—

“I don't see how you stand by me, Filippa. Throw me over and I won't say a word.”

She came nearer and stood close against him. Drawing both hands gently across his cheeks as if to smooth away all trace of suffering, she smiled and looked up into his face.

“Stevey darling, no matter how bad you are, or whatever you may do, I forgive you now, in advance.”

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At the next performance, Monday afternoon, Stephen and Filippa ran out into the arena as usual, were hoisted to the upper air, and there, aloft, upon the high trapeze, they excited the wonder of the audience.

At the right moment, when Filippa, alone and hanging by her hands, had acquired a long, appalling swing, the music ceased.

Then, in a silence so profound that nothing was heard except the creaking of the iron rings that held the two trapezes to the trusses of the roof, she let go her hold and sailed away. Among the thousands of upturned faces there were some that grew a trifle paler. And no one breathed.

Steve, head downward, hanging by his knees from the other trapeze, came soaring up in that direction, as usual, in the very nick of time, and, as usual, cool-headed and with strength to spare. He clutched the outstretched hands. The music burst madly forth, rejoicing, triumphant; Filippa clambered to the bar above, and Stephen followed.

To and fro they swung, a fearful distance, showering kisses to the applauding multitude below.

Both were breathing fast. As they started on a forward journey like birds above a field of human faces, Filippa's hair flying backward from her temples, the artificial rose a-flutter, Steve turned and

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looked into the eyes beside him. There was too much noise up there for conversation, but no words were needed. The short glance into each other's faces revealed all they had to say,—not all, of course, but the most important. Her answering smile told the simple story of an unalterable trust.

And perhaps Stephen made no mistake in believing himself the happiest man in that vast enclosure—or in the world.

